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Dairi Hishikage
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The Shaman That Can't Become A Hero

Arc 1: Shiramine Academy Class 2-7

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Shiramine Academy Class 2-7 Attendance Record

Shiramine Academy, Class 2-7. Attendance record. 41 students.

Boys. 22 students.

Seat No. 1: Azuma Shinichi - Boy's class representative

Seat No. 2: Ito Seiji

Seat No. 3: Ueda Youhei - Archery club

Seat No. 4: Ooyama Daisuke - Karate club

Seat No. 5: Kousaka Hiroki - Soccer club

Seat No. 6: Saitou Masaru - Archery club

Seat No. 7: Sakurai Touya - Archery club

Seat No. 8: Satou Yuuya

Seat No. 9: Shimokawa Junnosuke

Seat No. 10: Sugino Takashi - Judo club

Seat No. 11: Souma Yuuto - Kendo club

Seat No. 12: Takashima Yuudai - Baseball club

Seat No. 13: Tendou Ryuichi

Seat No. 14: Nakai Shouta

Seat No. 15: Nakajima Haruma - Art club

Seat No. 16: Hayama Relight - Basketball club

Seat No. 17: Higuchi Kyouya

Seat No. 18: Hirano Kouhei - Soccer club

Seat No. 19: Momokawa Kotarou - Literature club

Seat No. 20: Yamakawa Junichirou - Drama club

Seat No. 21: Yamada Genki - Baseball club

Seat No. 22: Yokomichi Hajime

Girls. 19 students.

Seat No. 31: Reina Adelhide Ayase

Seat No. 32: Iijima Mayumi

Seat No. 33: Kitaooji Rurika - Cooking club
Seat No. 34: Kizaki Akane - Volleyball club
Seat No. 35: Kisaragi Ryouko - Girl's class representative
Seat No. 36: Kenzaki Asuna - Kendo club
Seat No. 37: Satou Aya
Seat No. 38: Shinohara Emi - Illustration club
Seat No. 39: Souma Sakura - Archery club
Seat No. 40: Takanashi Kotori
Seat No. 41: Nagae Yukiko - Literature club
Seat No. 42: Natsukawa Minami - Track and field
Seat No. 43: Nishiyama Minori - Brass band
Seat No. 44: Nonomiya Julia - Tennis club
Seat No. 45: Hinagiku Saya - Archery club
Seat No. 46: Himeno Airi
Seat No. 47: Futaba Meiko - Cooking club
Seat No. 48: Yoshizaki Maria - Tennis club
Seat No. 49: Randou Kyouko

Notes:

I wish I knew what this was...

Prologue - Momokawa Kotaro

September 19th, Respect for the Aged Day. I, Momokawa Kotaro, 2nd year student of Shiromine Private Gakuen, am enjoying the so called national holiday. To be specific, I'm currently hunting for light novels, mangas, and games until I reach the center of the city.

Although I belong only in the literature club, for a typical student like me, who's getting by with just a monthly allowance from his parents, I can't afford to spend too much of my funds in just one trip. I'm somewhat an otaku-ish student, but I don't think I necessarily categorize as one. Currently I don't have problems with my economic condition, considering I was originally a cheapskate.

「Maybe it's time to go back」

As I'm leaving the large bookstore from where I bought a copy of this month's light novel, the sun was already inclined to the back of the mountain, coloring the cloudless, early autumn sky with a crimson color.

Maybe it was because I'm shopping alone, I had a little premonition of the vanity of life when I saw that sunset, as I was walking sloppily on the road without thinking anything.

「Hey, don't touch me ! 」

That, even if I can't say it as something like shrill, the nuance of the girl's voice was like a scream. (EN: Why can't the author just say it was a girl's scream?)[TL : Because it's a girl scream]

When I noticed, I was looking curiously at the alleyway from where that voice came from.

「Eh, no way 」

In that place, there were four men encircling two girls, I was partly expecting it but, the spectacle was filled with surprise.

The two girls were wearing the recently outdated sailor uniform. That was

obvious since I am also going to Shiromine Gakuen. One of the girls with shoulder length hair is a cute girl, while the other one is just a plain glasses girl without any conspicuous point.

It seems the one who's screaming is the former. Though the glasses-san face is turning pale as she completely stepped back, it was clear when looking from where I was currently standing.

「Oioi, you shouldn't say those kinds of words to gentlemen like us, right ? 」

Saying that, the man corrected the two girls. Looking like gentlemen, no matter how he says it they're completely more like Yankees or hoodlums, despite their correction. What the heck is with that loose hip-hop parka, where the heck did he buy it?

But, no matter how stereotypical these juvenile delinquents are, I just couldn't do something stupid with the reality before me. They're also high school students like me, even more so, they're most likely from the infamous Kurokawa high and are nicknamed as "Students of Kuro high"*. [TL : Kurokawa means "Black River" while the nickname changed into "Black High School"]

「Nope, no matter what you say, that's impossible right? 」

Even I need to think twice with my game filled-brain, whether I must go against opposing those four hardcore Yankees to save the girls whose face isn't even in my memory only because they're of the same school as mine.

How can I fight against those Yankees with nice builds with my meager 152 cm height and 45 kg* weight. Of course I don't have that sort of mastery of martial arts or something with me. My poor specs match my appearance. [TL* : Shota?] [EN: Shota indeed]

「Damn it, I don't see anything, I really didn't see anything..... 」

I mean, who the heck going to blame me from running away at once from this place.

I mean, see, I'm not the only one who notices this situation. Everyone is just hurriedly getting away from this place since some time ago even though they had a glance in this alleyway for a moment, they're just passing it like that as if it has nothing to do with them.

unable to do after all.)

I'm not at fault here, I mean I don't think these guys are at fault too. There are some things that humans are able and unable to do after all.

That's right, no matter how bad these delinquents are, they're not something like atrocious criminals who will rape or murder someone so calmly. After all, despite being students from the infamous "Black High", it's only at the point of where they're repeatedly receiving a "Grace" from the police when causing some brawl. I mean, though those two girls are a little frightened, they'll eventually be released by those thugs.

And then, when I'm about to leave this place as I turned away with my eyes shut tight, I felt a strong sense of self-loathing in myself.

「Oi, what have you been looking at ? 」

「HAH ! ? 」

I unintentionally look back toward the voice that called me. The four thugs who's looking with trance expression at the two girls was simultaneously looking at my direction.

「No-Uhm, I just —— 」

「Hah, WHAT, THIS GIRL IS SO INDIFFERENT HUH ? 」

They keep saying whatever they want, easily interrupting my all-out excuse.

「He~, You're quite a cute one there, want to become our girl」

「You stupid, look, no matter how you look at it, SHE IS A HE」

「Hah, seriously ? isn't she just wearing a boyish style?」

「EH? Hah? Damn it, are you kidding me, that'll make me[ore*] lose my self-confidence right」[TL* : Momokawa usually using Boku]

You guys might be joking right, no matter how you look at it, I[boku] am a man —— or so I thought, it's painful since I can't retort them.

I[boku], who has an androgynous face, though it might sound nice right, it doesn't mean that I'm the so called handsome boy with rosy cheeks.

Though I've big eyes, it's more like scornful eyes of the evil stray cat. Even if

my eyebrows are somewhat thick, it's unbalanced with my baby face. I'm definitely not a bishoujo but, this level is around the level of a frail girl in the class right.

With these and a little bit of height, though there's a possibility that I can be judged as a man, I can't think of my small and slender build as only because nutritional deficiency. With my somehow round and shorth shoulder width, it made me lose my only chance for someone to make a distinction of my gender even just by my silhouette. It seems that my hair which is on the long side is also the reason for someone to mistake my gender. It's not like I have any intention to cut it though. Because I'll look more childish when I cut it short. [TL : Poor little Momokawa] [TL : just cut it already] [TL : Pitted between rock and hard place huh][EN: Just be the shota that you are!]

I mean my current attire is, a little loose white parka in a common jeans[jacket] and it's not the kind of fashion that will bring in manly charm.

Even so, in the first what I need to do in the current situation is not to make an appeal to explain my gender, I need to made an escape from this place ASAP.

Maybe they'll chase me out of curiosity if I escaped as it is. This place is somewhat quiet, that's if you don't accidentally end up in this place.

「A-Uhm ! They're my friends and we're about to play with our classmate ! 」

I'm calling it, the strategy of "Some of my fellow are waiting on my back". It's a more reliable strategy than the sink or swim 「Police officer-san, they're right here」, right.

「Ah, then ? My bad then, it's look like that plan going to be canceled」

It was shot down.

「Eh-No, that'll be troubling」

「I say it's okay, you're these two's companion right ? Come along with us, we'll give you a lot of love whether you're a boy or girl」 [TL : Eh!?] [EN: This is about to turn into a shota BL!]

Chills ran through my spine towards the words of the long haired-dye in brown colored-man who first recognized me as girl. This guy, is he drunk ! .

[EN: What a descriptive sentence!]

Oh crap, I should run away with a dash without thinking about guilty feeling or something. Though it's a little unsightly, I'll run to that konbini* and shouting「HELP ME ! 」。At worst, they might be just call the police. [TL* : Minimart]

And then, with that plan in my mind, I'm do a 180° turn and break into a sprint without minding about the onlookers.

「Fugya ! 」

But, my first step to escape was meeting with whatever object in front of me, my body which received the damage was rolling miserably on the cold road. That's hurt.

「Are, you, are you Momokawa ? 」

Uwa, someone is grabbing my arm when I'm knocked down, a refreshing tenor voice can be heard from above me who's half crying. When I raised my face reflexively, there's two faces that I recognized at that place.

「Ah, Souma-kun, Tendou-kun」

「Are you alright ? It seems you fell in a rather flashy way」

「Leave it, it'll look pitiful to let it go as it is」

My expression turned sour but, the ikemen were unexpectedly standing in that place. [EN: What is the author trying to say?][TL : basically he met two ikemen]

The one who's worrying about me is Souma Yuuto.

Putting on a sweet mask of an embarrassed idol wherever he goes with his tall and slender figure is the subject of admiration, even for men. If I was a girl, I would've certainly fell for him.

And pointing to that matter, despite being a little sharp, is a big guy with a different charm than Souma-kun.

His name is Tendou Ryuichi.

With a height surpassing 190 cm, and massive frame with well-toned muscles.

That peculiar, face isn't the gorilla type, and paired with his blonde colored-dyed hair, he's a wild ikemen with a sharp look.

Despite the difference in style, they're wearing same gakuran which can be differentiated with the girls' uniform of Shiromine gakuen wore by the two girls over that alleyway . Even so, since they're famous within the school, there's no one who didn't know of their face.

What's more, since they're my classmates who personally know me, they won't mistake me even if I'm wearing everyday clothes.

「Ah-Uhm, since I'm actually okay, please save those two over there」

「あ、うん、僕のことはいいから、あっちの二人を助けてあげて」

I stand quickly and showing the alleyway where the sum total of 6 person were gathered in. It might be obvious what kind of the situation right now.

「CHE, the guys from Black high huh」

「It seems」

See, they instantly understood the situation.

Souma-kun is the holder of many heroic tales in which he saved many students of Shiromine in trouble with thugs without differentiating between gender, while Tendou-kun is the holder of legendary feats in which he's fought 10 thugs alone. Oh God if it's the two of them who have cheat statuses lending their hand, whether it's 2, 3, or 4 thugs, they'll somehow accomplish it.

「Well then, I will -」

「Geez, meeting such trouble again. Yuuto, let's do this like the usual」

「As you wish, Ryuichi. Our fellow students will be in trouble if we didn't help them ASAP」

Apparently, they already forgetting about my existance. Luckily, thanks to the gallant entry of these two striking ikemen combi, the 4 thugs also forgot about me.

Or not, only that long haired-fake blondie is the one who's looking with regretful expression at me who made an escape. Uwaa, so disgusting

At any rate, just like that I escaped from that predicament. [TL : Yeah, and quite a dangerous one too] [EN: No BL for the lady readers][TL : I'm glad it didn't happen otherwise I'm afraid that it'll sap my SAN]

Ha~h, I'm so miserable no matter where I go, just how small of an existence am I compared to those two. I unintentionally self-loath my own powerlessness. But, not feeling disgusted or regret is also a common misunderstanding.

I'm different from them. Be it my face, brain, strength, or wisdom. Undoubtedly, including luck.

But, I'm not feeling pessimistic about that. The great majority in this world is are not the kind of people who excell in just about anything and everything like them. They're just too special.

けど、それを悲観することはない。

この世の大多数は彼らのような何もかも優れた人物ではないのだ。

彼らが特別すぎるだけのこと。

Since I'm looking at them from near, it's not natural that I get used to their radiance.

I'm me, it's been like that so far, even from now on, I'll spend my life corresponding to my own abilities. Amongst the people who live this way, something like saving the beautiful girl in pinch is an impossible event.

Regarding today's incident, right, I managed not to get punched and safely escaped from that place. In addition, with the two heroes entering the scene to save the day, the girls are is saved, the thugs are punished, it's a perfect ending.

And me, just a mob character who's just happened to be on in that place, the Student A. I'm not dissatisfied with that role or anything. Because I'm not suited to save those girls.

Just like them who like brave heroes, that role isn't suited for me.

Chapter 1: Class 2-7

September 20th, weekday. The huge building of Shiramine Private Academy is swallowing up listless students returning to school after a 3-day break.

It is a time when the morning chime is just about another 10 minutes away. More than half of the students of class 2-7, of which I am a member, are already seated, or standing chatting with classmates, enjoying the morning.

"Buhahahaha! My sides! So, what'd you do then, Kotaro?"

The male student raising this boisterously vulgar laughter is the big-bodied, round-faced Saitou Masaru, a buddy of mine all the way from middle school.

"The hell do you expect? I left it to the other two and went home."

I am scrunching my slightly thick-ish eyebrows and recounting the events from yesterday.

"You what? Such a waste. You got that delicious event right in front of you, and could've raised a flag with just a bit more!"

"With Souma-kun and Tendou-kun there, do you seriously expect me to take the stage? In the first place, there's literally no way I can think about events and shit when there's a group of real live punks right in front of me."

I express my truly humble opinion while glaring at my slightly excited friend.

"No well, wasn't there just 4 of 'em? I could've even easily done something with only those numbers? Truly, such a shame. Should've gone with you yesterday."

He really seems to like those damsel-in-distress situations, Masaru's been going on and on about it for a while now. He's in top condition as always.

Looking at my friend engaged in his delusions with warm eyes, with his height and build like a sumo-wrestler, in a real brawl-out, he'd most likely put up a much better fight than me, I thought.

The short wooden sword, which he insists is solely for self-defence, hidden away in his backpack might finally make its debut. Though I don't think those

special techniques inherited from battle manga he claims to have mastered will be at all useful.

"As for me, I'm just glad I didn't get beaten to a pulp. And also, those two seems to have smoothly finished the rescue."

I direct my vision towards the teacher's platform where a mishmash of boys and girls have gathered. Their proper appearance and refreshing chatter resembled a cliché scene from high school dramas.

Souma Yuuto, also among those members, his outstanding face and charm made him seem to be literally shining. He could easily be dubbed the protagonist, or at least, there was no doubt, he was the central figure of the group.

"Damn Souma, saving not only one, but two girls. Looks like you're the hero even on holidays."

"You're overexerting. I just happen to pass by, and Ryuichi was there too, so it somehow just happened."

"But Souma-kun, you could've handled them even by yourself right?"

"Hmm, well, I guess I could've won even without the training swordbokutou if it was only that much."

Pointing an ear for a bit, and I hear this kind of dialogue.

Souma-kun's "could've won" has tremendous persuasiveness when he's actually got a track record of saving girls.

By the way, that training sword he mentioned, unlike a certain somebody insisting on carrying one for self-defence, he carries it for the actually legitimate reason of Kendo club use. The bamboo sword bag he always shoulders along with his schoolbag seems to contain a wooden sword used for practice swings.

It's obvious that having a weapon ala wooden sword is better than being bare handed, but combined with his Nationals level skill, Souma-kun can certainly kick ass. To boot, with him and his childhood pal, Tendou Ryuichi, often getting involved in fights, he's got the first hand experience too.

"Gununu...W-well, Souma's on the strong side I guess, a measly 4 delinquents

are obviously child's play. Even I know I'm not at his level yet."

"Give it up Masaru, you're not even close to rivaling Souma-kun."

To the Masaru, gallantly nodding to himself while arms crossed as if saying something profound, it's a true friend's job to burst his bubble with a good retort.

"Though, I can't say I don't know the feeling."

Going back to eavesdropping onto the Souma group, now a truly envious situation is in the midst of unfolding.

"I take my eyes off him for one second, and nii-sanbrother does it again. Please try to restrain yourself a little."

"Ahaha, you worry too much Sakura. I'm completely fine see?"

The female student calling to him as big brother was, along with himself, one of the top celebrities of Shiramine Academy. Not because of her relation to him as his twin sharing the same Souma surname, but because this Souma Sakura possesses just as much as charm as her brother.

Long glossy black hair, complexion white as snow. The sailor uniform accentuating her slender but curvy, sexy body line, and smooth long legs extending from the dark-blue pleated skirt.

A small head, thin contours, a face as if crafted passionately by the hands of God. Especially the big yet sharp eyes are perfect beyond words. Those jet-black eyes possess an almost deadly charm.

Her superior appearance was not all. With a sharp mind, and excellent athletic ability, she truly possessed the best of both worlds. A member of the Archery club, like her brother, she was a regular at the National level.

Leaving aside appearance and ability, her courteous behaviour with colleagues, and respectful mannerisms with superiors - she displayed picturesque upstanding morals.

She would more appropriately be called the school Idol. No man would not desire such an idealised Yamato-Nadeshiko-esque girl.

However, there existed no frivolous rumours of her since enrollment, as she's

always stuck to her brother like glue.

"And there you go again nii-san, you always -"

My eyes now reflected her drawing closer to her brother which would certainly not be an appropriate, far too close, distance of interaction between boys and girls of our age. Even I could see the objectionability of their closeness in both the physical and mental sense. Personal Space, I wonder if that's a thing.

"Haa..."

I look away from the charming brother-sister duo who don't look anything other than a lovey-dovey couple, but the conversation nonetheless flows right back into my ears.

"- At least think of how I feel constantly having to worry."

"Yeah my bad, I'll take better care from next time."

And on this side, Masaru's usual foul expression seems to have worsened, his teeth-grinding, auditory display of jealousy in full view.

Nope, He's hopeless. Falling for that Souma Sakura is simply bad math. To my friend whose loss has been decided even before the game, I have no words.

For Masaru, it was love at first sight from the day of enrollment. But personally, I just couldn't laugh at this development. For the people in the same predicament as him are too numerous. In consequent, the male students chasing after her, caused the phenomenon of a great influx of membership into the Archery club this year and last, him also becoming one such member. I simply couldn't laugh at him, this Saito Masaru.

Well, he's just a ghost member now though.

Just quitting would be simple, but that not having happened perhaps demonstrates the complexity of the human heart.

While thinking these philosophical and useless things, I follow Masaru's line of sight to find the appearance of the little sister, Sakura, looking down with a flushed face while having her brother caress her head and saying "Sorry, my bad".

Nah, I should just tell him its better to give up.

While the handsome brother-sister couple are off in their own cherry-colored world, I get myself ready to dish out a harsh reality.

The woman known as Souma Sakura is dangerous. She would certainly drive to madness, many hordes of men. I don't care what the fellows of the Souma Sakura underground fan club does, but I won't regret saving this friend of mine from falling to the Dark Side.

"Ah!! Sakura-chan no fair, Yuu-kun, pat my head too -"

And there appears the ternary force, barging right into the middle of the isolated world of brother and sister.

A small, even compared to my own 150cm4ft 11 height, and who would be seen as nothing but a middle schooler, or maybe even a grade schooler if you're not careful, girl raised a high pitched voice and forcibly tackled into Souma Yuuto.

Well, though I expected some violent intervention as this point in time, even I can't help up cast a cold look at the scene before me.

"Eh, well I guess I'll have to, for you Reina."

"Ehehe - do it s'more,"

"Nii-san, please don't spoil her so much."

Completely ignoring Sakura's nagging, the girl who was enjoying a helping of Souma Yuuto head-patting as if she was a pet dog was Reina Adelhide Ayase, the 2nd childhood friend.

She's maybe half or perhaps a quarter, well anyway, as can be guessed from the surname, she's an inheritor of western blood, and, dissimilar to Souma Sakura, gives off yet a different kind of beauty resembling a French doll.

Her hair, a natural blonde hue fashioned into twintails, and her eyes the color of a beautiful clear sky, certainly not to be mistaken for color contacts.

"kuWA*anger* - Souma you're so dead, I wanna stroke Reina-tan too -"

"Masaru, just give up."

This guy even has a thing for lolis. So you don't care as long as they're hot

huh.

But still, I can't call Masaru a pervert for being fond of Reina A. Ayase. Same as before, this is because many hordes of men have also fallen victim to this girl's charm.

Certainly, seeing this kind of energetic yet naïve character, I, who am not a lolicon, too can understand that the protective instincts of a man are roused by this small, thin girl.

Though I say that, I'm still not rooting for Masaru even a bit. At the very least, I want him to show some sincerity and pick one of the two he really wants to go for.

And leaving aside my friend who is currently burning in jealousy, there is Souma Yuuto who has Sakura and Reina, a flower in both arms - or rather to him, they must be the annoying sister and the spoiled childhood friend putting him in a difficult situation yet again. But reality is that he's super close to two first rate hotties, and is even surrounded by kind friends he can rely on, having just a swell time. Is that really the correct way to spend youth?

I have not fallen for Souma Sakura, nor have I feelings for Reina A. Ayase, but seeing Souma Yuuto's, this kind of lifestyle makes me feel an absolute inferiority even if I don't want to.

No let's stop, it's a stupid way to think. He's him, and I'm me.

He's but a special exception. Because I see this rosy life in front of me everyday in class, I tend to forget just how much of an exception he is. Grade school, and middle school never had an existence to cause this kind of overwhelming inferiority.

I have a friend in class too. And we too spend everyday having fun with stupid conversations. I also enjoy writing my edgychuuni light novels while desperately trying to make the literature club magazine deadline. After confirming that my own school life is more than satisfactory, the petty and meaningless inferiority complex quickly disappears.

I do think I want to get along better with girls, but thinking of how that's a problem faced by the mass majority of Japanese male students makes it much

less painful.

"Mm, the chime should ring any moment now."

Casually looking at the wall clock in the classroom, the needle is only a minute away from the first chime.

The homeroom teacher may appear just before the chime rings, so as I stand up to return to my own seat, it happens. The classroom door opens with a sharp rattle and two people come rolling in.

"Do - n't pull so hard, Ryoko! C'mon it's fine being a li'l late right?"

"Shut up, Ryuichi, just get to your seat."

With such an exchange, our class 2-7 class rep. Kisaragi Ryoko, grabbing Tendou Ryuichi by the hand, bursts in and crosses the front of the classroom with her shoulder length hair in a flutter.

Kisaragi-san, a tall and slender, with cool eyes in depthless spectacles, a sharp-looking beauty, standing beside the large and handsome Tendou-kun, doesn't look out of place at all. No, it can be said that she's the only one who has a rightful place beside him.

"Sup Ryuichi, got caught by the rep. again?"

"Yea, just my luck. My morning joint was ruined all thanks to that."

To Souma-kun's refreshing greeting, Tendou-kun returns a truly dissatisfied reply.

"Joint? What, you have cigarettes on you? Take them out now, Ryuichi."

"H-hey wait, the price got higher just the other day, so don't take the one I haven't even open -"

"Yup, no more of that."

The hundred yen yet unopened box of cigarettes were nimbly pulled out from the front pocket of his uniformgakuran by Kisaragi-san.

Having his relief goods seized without mercy, Tendou-kun complains without giving in, but Kisaragi-san's stoic face and cold eyes pay no consideration to his desperate claims.

Fuck, not my lucky day, as the boy complains, his long time best friend Souma-kun gives him words of consolation. Yup, with that refreshing smile,

"Not like you want to, but good job keeping this up every morning, you too class rep."

He said in a somewhat given up tone, a statement even I can wholeheartedly agree with.

Barely making the first chime, this super serious class rep. dragging in our greatest delinquent to class is a daily scene for the class of 2-7. Kisaragi-san somehow finds this Tendou-kun from anywhere he may intend to go ditching class, and forcefully makes sure he's there during role call.

She herself insists it's her job as class rep. to do this, but no matter how you look at it, this is clearly outside her job description. As a result, the fact that she's doing this because she 'wants to' is only unknown to herself, and has been made an undeniable truth in the class of 2-7.

That aside, with the meddlesome class rep. bringing in the blonde haired delinquent with her before the first chime, all of Shiramine Academy, class 2-7, have gathered in the classroom.

I look at the clock a 2nd time and, the minute hand is just about to make its tiny mechanical sound and denote the instant of when the chime would sound. Holidays aside, it is a sound I hear everyday, the ding-dong-dang-dong melody that any student would be very familiar with but—

GI, GIGIGI, GI - IIIIIII!!

That unpleasant metallic sound rang throughout the classroom.

"Ua!!?"

Plugging the ears is something not only me, but everyone in the classroom did almost reflexively. There's also the cute 'Kya - 's coming from girls scattered about.

There's the usual ting sound of the of the intercom speakers - no this sound is much more painful! Kuu*groan*, I got a bad feeling...

This shrill noise echoing in from all 360 degrees around this classroom felt

absolutely nauseating. In my brief 17 years of life, I've never experienced such a terrible stomach churning sound.

Well, with not yet getting sick enough to actually throw up, the sound stopped.

What in the world was that sound, these kinds of mutterings from practically everyone's mouths filled the classroom.

At that time, something happened yet again - suddenly, as if a candle being blown out, all light from the classroom disappeared.

"Eh, blackout!?"

The situation worsens, as we lost all sources of light, enough to submerge my chubby friend in front of me into complete darkness.

Though it was I myself who claimed it was a blackout, looking at the current situation, that theory is instantly denied.

For right now, it is morning. The time is 8:45 am. Today's forecast, continuing from yesterday, another clear autumn sky. Though the windows weren't open like in the summer, the uncurtained windows let the gentle sunlight splash into the big classroom. At least, until 2 seconds ago.

Wait, why, why is it dark even outside?

The inside of the classroom became rowdier. Not only screaming from girls but some boys' ones were mixed in there too. Or rather, their angry voices were.

I'd said nothing more after my previous statement. But I recognised the bizarreness of the situation as well, and had broken out in a cold sweat.

"O-oi Kotaro, what's up with this, why's it gone dark all a sudden? This some kinda prank show?"

Masaru's voice had a clearly anxious tremble, but I wasn't in a state to make fun of him for that. I'm shaken up just as well.

"D-donno man... but it doesn't seem like one at least?"

A blackout is more than probable, realistically speaking. However, I can't

really imagine a method of instantly blocking all the windows and blanketing the whole classroom in complete darkness. It is a strangeness I can't even hypothesize about.

Of course, uncertain about what this abnormality is, there's no finding the cause or the resolution for it. And from the uproar all around, I don't think anyone in class has any idea either.

As the class was falling deeper into panic, this time, the lights turned back on.

The fluorescent lights on the ceiling lit up, filling the place with their artificial white light, like it was a matter of course.

"Ah, its back."

I ended up speaking out.

Well, that was probably the general feeling of everyone here, and for now, the brighter classroom dispelled the fear of darkness, and ameliorated the situation.

But, it was not like everything went back to normal.

"Oi, look out the window!"

I don't know who said this, but even without the alert, the abnormality was easy to discover.

"It's pitch black."

Yeah, Masaru replies. Just like everyone else, the two of us sitting on the hallway side of the room stared dumbfounded at the other side of the window shrouded in absolute darkness.

"The hell, I can't see shit."

"Should I open it?"

"Stop dumbass, that's just screams bad idea"

A group of guys on the window side of the room were having this dialogue. Not opening the windows was probably the consensus among the whole class.

As if painted with a coat of black, the windows reflected nothing at all.

Though it was difficult to understand, the class that began to recognize this obvious bizarreness, once again plunged into a state of anxiety filled mutterings.

As the room began filling up with miscellaneous voices - within all the bustle, what's this sound... This is, from the intercom speakers where the chime usually goes off, comes a sound like that of a sandstorm!

Once I noticed it, I could clearly hear this grizzly sound. No, it was definitely getting louder.

"Guys, quiet down a bit. Something's coming from the intercom."

The one who silenced the class with that one statement was not me, but Souma Yuuto. He seems to have heard the noise from the speaker same as me.

Well, unlike me with my chubster friend here, he's in the blessed position of having beautiful sister snuggled to his right shoulder, and a cute childhood friend nestled on his left arm.

Anyway, with his help, my classmates all noticed the noise, and hoping for some rescue info, began to listen attentively at the speaker.

In the silenced classroom, the sandstorm like noise somehow started to resemble human speech.

"Ca... he...r me"

I have no idea what they're saying, but that was unmistakably a voice. Like a radio being tuned, the voice slowly but surely became clear.

"Can you hear me?"

Is that a male teacher? Slowly, a gentle voice sounded clearly from the speaker.

Even if you ask if we can hear you, obviously no one's gonna answer. Everyone kept their silence and paid attention to the man's voice.

"Good, seems like my voice is connecting fine."

It's almost like he knows everything that's going on here. Though I'm not unable to read the mood and won't voice out that opinion.

"First, please calm down and listen. You are all, right now, about to fall into grave danger. That too, not something realistic like an earthquake or typhoon."

A slight anxiety runs throughout the classroom.

Even though I denied this being some part of a prank show, having the irregularity of the situation properly declared, fills me in great anxiety and tension. Never mind the goosebumps and endless trembling.

"You are all currently en route to a completely different place, another world in fact, from the place called Japan on Earth."

"Wha-?"

I reflexively let out that sound. Though it was still much better than the slowly bubbling panic in the classroom.

"To you who have been living in a world without magic, my words may seem sudden and doubtful. But right now, we don't have the time. Before you're stranded on this dangerous place, I hope you can follow my instructions."

Um, hey, the story's getting a bit weird here...

My pulse is rising like an alarm bell, and my body, trembling from a full power sense of danger.

Another world? Magic? Dangerous place? All of these were jargon completely alien to normal life. If I had to guess, it could be some mysterious recreation forced upon us by the school. But even emergency drills would have a more believable story.

Though, looking out the window into the piercing darkness, we must admit, even reluctantly, that we are, right now, in fact not in a daily life situation, but one so irregular that literally anything could happen.

No one could just laugh off this bizarre explanation.

"You probably possess paper and pens. First, please look at the markings, Magic Formations and Incantations, drawn here and copy them down."

At those words, everyone here had a question mark above their heads. This man has been speaking from the other side of the intercom, apparently from another world with magic, and who knows if he's using a mic, but still he has no

means to get any visual information.

But that one doubt was certainly answered. As right then, the 41 students of this class 2-7, including me, paid witness to the existence of magic.

"U-ua, it's drawing on its own..."

Everyone's eyes were now focused on, perhaps the thing that occupies the vast majority of a student's visual focus, the blackboard.

There, on that characteristic dark-green surface of the blackboard, a white line was dancing by itself.

Not like anyone's using a chalk. First of all, along with the line being drawn, the faint light being given off, not from a cathode-ray tube or liquid crystal screen, but an everyday blackboard was truly very magical.

As everyone was speechlessly staring at the blackboard, within a minute the magic inscription is completed.

"Now then, do copy down this Magic Formation and Incantation. With this, you can get our support wherever you are. I will explain the usage in three minutes' time, but for now, concentrate on this task."

With that, the voice from the speaker came to a pause.

"Guys, for now, let's sit down and get these down in our notebooks."

As we were debating on what to do, the calm voice of Souma Yuuto is heard.

Right now, having to face such a mysterious phenomenon, that voice seemed highly trustworthy. It's probably better to quietly follow his instructions and not have any weird suspicions.

Without any particular reluctance, the students quickly reaching their seats, taking out their notebook from their bags, and writing down what's on the board, was a fine show of honed Japanese student behaviour. Of course, I'm also included in that description.

And then, just like in a time-constrained test, the classroom is dominated by silence.

From my seat at the very back of the hallway side, I carefully regarded the

magic-drawn characters on the blackboard, while swiftly running a pen on my slim notebook.

The shapes weren't all that complicated so there's no chance to get them wrong, and the incantation was also conveniently written in Japanese.

At the center of the board was drawn a simple magic circle similar to a coin. The middle of it had a cross-like shape, and around it and running along the inner and outer circumferences of the circle were alphabet-like letters. Of course, I've never seen any magic circle like this.

Meanwhile, the incantation written in Japanese reads:

"Oh Gods above, grant us salvation with the force of thy miracles. For we shall adhere to thine decree."

So it was this obviously pandering to the gods for help kind of statement. Very neat handwriting though.

By the way, there were no meaningsfurigana attached to any of the wordskanji, but students who couldn't understandread wordskanji at this level would probably not be found at a famous university prep school like Shiramine Academy.

And as I finished copying down the formation and incantation, I stuffed my campus notebook back into my bag.

The unknown man's voice wasn't here yet. There's likely around another minute of time left, so as I attempt to make sure from the wall clock, the hands are stuck at 8:45. Well, I don't really feel like getting my phone out to check. I'll just be patient.

And, with this free time at hand, naturally I look around the classroom to see what's going on. Looks like almost everyone's pretty much done.

Many have finished up with their note-taking and are whispering with their surroundings or taking a pic of the blackboard with their phonesmartphones.

Speaking of phones, of course many tried to contacting the outside, but all forms of signals happen to be out of range, is something I deduced from the chattering. I also attempted to use my phone, and as expected, it was to no

avail. By the way, mine happens to be a flip phone. I'm pretty much broke.

Well, even though it's another world, it'll probably prove useful at some point.

Suppressing the ever-increasing uneasiness in my heart, I stuff the phone into the depths of my bag. Since no one's gonna be calling anyway, I turn the power off too.

At that moment, something small and white rolled in towards my feet. Its momentum coming to a rest from hitting my indoor shoes, wearing a black, white and blue striped sleeve, a product from the same brand I happen to use as well, it was an eraser.

Probably belongs to the next seat over. Without thinking too hard, I almost reflexively picked up the eraser.

"Futaba-san, yours?"

"Y-y-yeah, thank you Momokawa-kun."

The one receiving back her misplaced item in the most nervous way was the female student seated on the desk next to mine, Futaba Meiko.

She was one who could stand proud as one of those, like Souma Yuuto, Souma Sakura, or Reina A. Ayase, who happen 'stand out' in this class of 2-7. This is not attributed to her beauty however. It's more of a, like, mass related thing.

Futaba Meiko was a big girl. Both horizontally and vertically.

Right now, she was taking the eraser from me, yet she was already a head taller than me. If we take my height of 150cm then she looks almost breaking past 180cm 5ft 11.

On top of that, she boasted a girth comparable to that of Saitou Masaru. If standing side-by-side with the tiny old me, one could think there was something wrong with the scaling factor of reality.

Fluffy, semi-long hair, a round face matching the body, and gentle downturned eyes which somehow made you think of a cow. The face, I thought was fairly pretty.

But more importantly, those rich breasts gave her an strong image of a

milking cow. Right now, her chest which seemed want to burst out from the sailor uniform in front of me, really accentuated their enormity. They're like the size of my head - I'm honestly made a bit excited. Men are weak to boobs. Especially if its me, the type who likes em big and loves em even bigger.

Shaking off those impure thoughts, I go ahead and turn away from my glance. Yes, I do have at least that much modesty. This girl by the name of Futaba Meiko and myself have no relation other than that of having our seats next to each other. Now that I think of it, this returning of her eraser was likely our first words to each other.

While I don't think much of anything of her other than her chest, at some point in time, I hear some girls from class started calling her with a horrible nickname like 'Butaba', which not only reminds me how frightening women can be, but also instigates a slight pity for her.

Anyway, perhaps because of that tiny bit of pity, as I see Futaba-san's notebook on top of her desk, with a crooked magic circle having already been drawn and erased several times, without much thought, I spoke up.

"Um, the formation, not done drawing?"

"Eh, Ah... Yeah."

Her round but somehow lovable face is distorted in a frown, actually, her eyes are also moist with tears.

Even without asking, that her mental state was confused and afraid due to our current happenstances was obvious. She may be double my size, but that doesn't change the fact that her mind was that of a simple teenage girl.

She may just be a klutz, but I could easily see she was shaken enough to not be able to draw the magic circle on the board.

"Here."

I take the notebook back out from my bag and, tearing off the page with the formation and the incantation, I hand it to Futaba-san.

"Eh, umm, this is"

"We don't know what could happen, it's better to have this."

Her round eyes opened wide with a start, and looked dumbfounded. But, there's no time for chit-chat. Right after leaving the torn off page on Futaba-san's desk, I recreated my own copy of the contents of the board.

"T-thankyou, Momokawa-kun!"

Still seated, I receive Futaba-san's thanks to which I reply with a curt 'Mhm' while running my pen. Getting a sincere thankyou from, a girl doesn't feel bad at all, or rather, it makes me a bit shy.

Her voice, surprisingly sweet in contrast to her figure, and that thick physique, with those extraordinarily large breasts that give an alluring jiggle as she lowers her head, also happens to contribute to my shyness.

"Now then, That's 3 minutes. If you haven't finished writing, please continue until you're done. However, please try and not miss the following explanation."

And with the continuation of the broadcast, I barely managed to finish up. Damn, that was close.

"It is simple to use this magic formation. You just have to put your hand over the drawing and speak the incantation. If you try it out now, the magic won't activate. When you've completely arrived to this world, it will become possible."

Some early birds were already trying out the described method of usage, but after hearing that condition, slightly embarrassed, they closed their notebooks.

"Using this magic would allow you to, with the help of the God whose name is inscribed on the formation, receive packets of information from our side. I believe you can understand better if I say texting?"

Not a phone call but text messaging, which would mean that they wouldn't send instructions through sound. Though it's magic, it probably comes with its own set of inconveniences.

"Basically, if you proceed according to the instructions, you should make it out fine. But, before you reach a place under our protection, there will likely be many dangers lying in wait. The principal of which would be entities known as 'Monsters'. But please rest assured, you would already have become residents of this other world. Implying, you would be able to wield powers impossible in

your previous life. You would even be able to harness magic. Using those powers, you will surely beat the monsters, and escape from danger."

The man's hot-blooded words tempted many of the boys into saying "Oh, sounds fun, it's like an RPG" in a carefree way.

Yeah no, that's pretty much impossible mode, like, if you can't muster enough power, isn't it a permadeath?

According to the man, these monsters which are a known danger to humans will surely be encountered by us. In the first place, we have to play survival on some strange unknown land. To top it off, if there're these monsters that actively prey on humans...this is too much.

This isn't some damn game. We're heading into another world, not some yet to be invented Virtual Reality adventure.

Attacking isn't a simple task of pushing a button and having the command sent and action automatically performed. We have to move using our own wills, our own bodies.

You can tell me about all the powers you want, but there's no guarantee I can bring out 100% of their potential. And there's even the high possibility that, faced with these fearsome monsters, we'd be completely unable to move out of fear. Especially for a weakling like me, it's a death sentence.

Even in the real world, a fight where I actually hit someone, my experience of those from the lower years of grade school were the last. Just yesterday I almost pissed myself in front of that group of 4. Actually, forget monsters, I have the confidence to lose even against a stray cat, if it went all out.

But unfortunately, this thing called a fight may just be impossible to avoid from here on out.

Yeah, I'm pretty much dead...

My face right now is definitely so pale, there probably isn't a more pathetic one possible. No really, I'd cry if I wasn't in public.

But, it seems I have some kindred spirits. Girls who are weak-willed are already producing sniffing sounds. Among them, was the large bodied Futaba

Meiko sitting next to myself.

"Now then, we're almost out of time. It is dangerous to stay inside this room. Get your things and get ready to head out."

The man's words forcibly move the plot along.

At this point, I can't just keep being pessimistic. With a small burst of courage, I stop my trembling body and, for now, start working. Picking up my commuting bag after shoving the magic circle notebook inside, I realize.

We're gonna be in this survival situation so textbooks are pretty much useless.

Paper could be useful for starting a fire, but that's no reason to walk around with something this heavy. It's obviously better to have a light load when escaping from monsters.

In contrast, as we know that magic formations and incantations exist, there is value in having notebooks to gather information in. Let's see, not too heavy, so I'll... OK, I'll leave only 2 in the bag.

As I look around the classroom, everyone's also getting ready for 'heading out' as the man said.

I'm of the literature club, so whether it's Souma Yuuto's wooden sword, his sisters bow, or a bat belonging to a baseball club member, I don't possess any such club related equipment.

Shit, the guys from the activity oriented clubs sure are in luck. I curse at them internally.

It's much more reassuring to be armed rather than not, and a bow can even give the possibility of ranged combat from a safe distance. On top of that, having been practicing with them every day, those people are actually competent in their usage. Compared to some newbie, this is a serious advantage.

That being said, it doesn't mean it's ok to swipe that sword bag from Souma-kun. There's probably some others who've also realized the same thing.

Unlike the plain old delinquent Tendou Ryuichi, the other more heinous class

punk, Higuchi Kyouya, has been leering at the Souma siblings with an openly bitter expression. Well, not like he'd actually try to attack someone like Souma-kun.

Higuchi Kyouya is tall and has a pretty good build, but just physical strength won't be enough to topple Souma-kun.

Well leaving aside the punkDQN, right now the safe bet would be to get protected by Souma-kun or Tendou-kun. To that end, it's unfavorable to cause any chaos with those two.

With that thought, I went to the back of the room where the shelves are, to retrieve the bag with my jersey. Since this is a survival, having another set of clothes is a priority.

My commuting bag, now free from the greatest deadweights known as textbooks and printouts, has more than enough space. I shove in the jersey with its bag whole.

Maybe they're following my lead, but some others are also getting their jerseys. Well, the jersey aside, do they really need that half-sleeves shirt and shorts soccer uniform?

"Soon, we will open the door leading outside. On my signal, leap out of this room."

As the class was still getting ready, along with the man's broadcasted voice, both doors of the classroom flew open with a rattle. Naturally, it was like an automatic movement which didn't require anyone's input.

Beyond the sliding doors, wasn't the familiar school hallways, but similar to the windows, a piercing darkness with no end in sight. Me being at the very back of the hallway side desks meant that I was the closest to the rear door and consequently, at the best position to peer into that darkness.

Uwa... Is it ok to jump from here? At least give us some kind of light producing magic.

Aside from wanting some convenient magic, everyone seems to have the common feeling of deep anxiety from this ominous darkness.

Looking dumbly at the door, no one had the courage or guts to take the initiative, and make a leap of faith.

"Hey, uh, this really the only way to do this?"

Perhaps worried about me at the very back and so close to the door, Masaru spoke up.

Right now, Masaru in the going-home club has, just like me, only his bag with the jersey, but he also has his self protection short-sword in there. Wait, will his dual-sword arts style techniques finally show their might... forgetting such jokes, right now I look again at the ominous exit before me.

"Yeah, really can't see anything. Don't really feel like jumping in either."

And just as I state my humble opinion.

"Now, quickly line up neatly in front of the door. The collapse should begin any moment now, but do not panic, wait for the signal."

Came the man's anxiety inducing explanation.

C-collapse, say what now... in the middle of that thought, screams from girls as well as boys rise from the window side.

"Kyaaa! It's breaking, something's breaking!?"

"Jeesus! This is seriously bad!"

Collapse, just as the word says. I see the windows, walls, and even the floor covered in black cracks, being swallowed up by the darkness outside. Seeing a wall with a window crumbling, the white curtains then fluttering, disappearing into the abyss gave me a truly strange impression.

The danger finally having made its appearance, the anxious and high tension classroom derailed into a raging panic all at once.

Especially, the window side students who begin fleeing towards us at the hallway side.

"Fuck, move it fatass!!"

I hear this remarkably loud roar.

Seated close to the window side, Higuchi Kyouya made a rush towards here

with the likeness of a demononi, and to the one standing in his way, no rather, the one just stiffened up in this moment of crisis - anywho, there was Futaba Meiko and her large self standing there.

As if looking at trash, Higuchi shoved Futaba-san away with full force like some inanimate obstacle.

"Kyaa!!"

With a high-pitched cry, her body is driven back in long strides.

Her seat was right next to mine. As in, she's right in front of me. As in, if she were to go backwards...

"Eh."

With Futaba-san's back closing in, I remember the time in grade school when we saw the horrific scene of a 10 tonne truck slamming into a plastic dummy in a traffic safety class.

My head occupied by that image, I simply could not react to this sudden development.

I just saw this huge butt projecting out towards me in something like slow-motion.

"Fugyaa!!"

Raising a cry like a cat that had its tail stepped on, I am blown away all too quickly by Futaba-san's large behind.

"Ah, Kotaro!?"

The surprised voice of my friend seemed awfully far. And that, was the last thing I'd heard from that classroom.

I see the light escaping from the classroom door moving away at fearsome speeds. Soon enough, that box of light became a dot, and then dissolved into complete darkness.

I see nothing, I hear nothing. I feel nothing. In the deafening silence, finally, I even lost my consciousness.

Chapter 2: Vocation "Shaman"

I open my eyes to the cold sensation of water droplets splashing on my cheeks.

"Ah... I'm alive."

No gaps in memory or dizziness. I only spoke out some dramatic likes about being alive because, flung out of the classroom via Futaba-san's big ass and falling into the abyss, I had prepared myself for death.

T-that was close.

My limbs are still attached, and actually, the fact that I don't have a single scratch on me is to be super grateful for. I feel like I could write a whole essay on the splendor of nature.

Well, even with feeling this great and experiencing the surrounding nature with all my eyes, ears and skin, the way down here was the same as a 90 degree straight vertical descent.

Spread out before me is a verdant forest of such grandeur that the more or less 500m high hill I climbed at an outdoor excursion before doesn't even hold a candle.

I'll, be fine right...

I can't think there's any escaping back to civilized land from the middle of this lush, dense forest that you only get to see on wild animal documentaries.

About my personal experience with the great outdoors, there was the two days one night camping trip with my folks. Well, rather than a test of mettle and resourcefulness, it was pretty much completely leisure.

But still, what a view. Whether you look left or right, you find trees, with more than the accumulated girth of five people, right in your face. These giants of green grow far into the sky, and with their large leaves, shroud the heavens enough to make it hard to find the sun.

Though it's not completely dark, the creeping despair in my heart makes the

place feel coated in pitch black.

But there is in fact a brighter side to this.

"Right, the magic circle!"

I never thought I could be this smart.

Matter of fact, as I just noticed I was holding onto my bag, it's not like I had any memory loss, I easily remember what that man said about magic and whatnot.

Thereafter, I opened my bag, took out the notebook, and on the slightly damp, bare ground, put down the page with the circle drawn, all within a minute.

"Umm, so like, I just have to put my hand on this and chant the incantation... right?"

I try to remember if there was anything else, nope, that much should be it. I didn't forget even though I only heard once, it was rather very clear and simple.

"Right, let's do this!"

If I keep meandering about it, I'll start wandering into increasingly negative thoughts like, what if I can't do it, what if the magic doesn't work *etc.* so for now, I'll just suck up my guts, and wing this magic business.

"Oh Gods above, grant us salvation with the force of thy miracles-"

This magic circle was drawn with a ballpen, more like a rough sketch really. But as soon as I put my right hand there, and recited that one phrase, the magic really began to show effect.

Those lines of ordinary black ink began to shine white under my hand. A light much in similar to when it's original was drawn on the blackboard.

There was a slight shock at the appearance of actual magic right there, but so as not to interrupt the casting, I calmly, slowly, precisely, continued the rest of the incantation.

"-For we shall adhere to thine decree."

And right as I finished.

Uaa!?

On the back of my hand that was placed above the notebook, a magic formation just like the one below, no, a similar one with some of the markings missing, shone with a poisonous looking red light.

As if the back of the hand was imprinted with the brand of the magic circle.

But rather than that bizarre phenomenon-

"u, ah, gyaaaaaaaaaa!"

I raised a scream unable to bear the sudden sharp pain that engulfed my whole body.

Ow! ow ow it hurts it hurts dammit-even in my head, it's only screams. A fearsome pain, the first of its kind I've felt in my whole life. As if I was captured by some evil organization and subjected to torture, it was an unforgiving, horrible suffering.

Ah, I'm done, I'll die.

As I had that feeling, my surroundings once again experienced a blackout. Like the lights going out at the flick of a switch, my consciousness was lost.

I hear a voice.

"هوى، مؤمن أو ظهرت في عدة أيام"

Ah, pardon me, can you repeat that in Japanese? My English is severely lacking.

"الآن، يمكنك حتى دون فهم، لا يهم"

I see, I see, Can you Kan nut speek Japaniz... No, wait a sec. Who cares about the language barrier.

I'm still alive.

"-ha!?"

Just as I realize this, I jumped straight up, and shot my eyelids open.

I'm conscious, my body moves, I can see too. I'm not dead yet-

"Yeah no... I am dead..."

This must be the place known popularly as Hell. I can't help but think that.

What reflects in my eyes, is the same pitch darkness I watched as I fell from the classroom just now. I can't even tell if I'm standing or floating in zero gravity.

Well, the location doesn't really matter right now. Certainly, it's not the bottommost priority, but a more important existence is standing in front of me. Right, in, front of me.

"ليس مخيفا"

Yes, the person in who's been speaking to me for the past while in English or who knows what language - was a Grim ReaperShinigami

If you see a skeleton in black, what else can you think? From under the deep hood, a skull with not a shred of meat or skin peeks out. In the depths of those abyssal eye sockets shine an ominous crimson light.

He's around a head taller than me. That in and of itself is a normal height, but regrettably, in front of a talking skull, I can't really fall back on common sense.

"E-ek... Excuse me..."

Please just spare my life, will something like that get through? Like, this is Hell, and the Reaper is speaking some strange language. But, I have to at least say it.

"Pleas-Fugya!?"

I couldn't even plead for my life.

The Reaper's hand suddenly gripped onto my head. I feel the surprisingly cold, hard texture of the bony palm. Is he gonna tear out my spine now?

"انه لامر مؤلم قليلا، ولكن لا تجعل مثل هذه الضجة على"

My head wasn't plucked off. Instead, the finger was jammed in. Right into my brain.

Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

Still grabbing my head, the Reaper's index finger pierces in. Of course, I can't see what's happening on top of my head. I can't see, but I can tell.

That right now, the sharp pointed tip of the finger is vigorously stabbing into my brain. I am made to clearly experience the disgusting feeling of having a fingertip on the inside of my cranium messing with my brain.

I let out a scream as soon as I felt that but-the real pain came a moment after.

"Ngii-"

I withstood the severe pain menacing my brain for perhaps a minute or maybe 10. Or maybe it lasted no more than 10 seconds.

"wha-!?"

I'd fallen unconscious. I noticed it as I was screaming till my throat felt broken, at which point I saw the Reaper take out his finger from my head.

"Name thyself, devotee."

I hear the Reaper's voice. Now that I hear it again, it's still a mysterious tone. Like a man, or a woman. Like someone aged, or in their infancy. I can't tell at all.

Well fine, more importantly... it's about understanding what he's saying. And about that, I'm just hearing plain Japanese.

"Make haste, thy name."

"M-momokawa... Kotarou."

I somehow answer. If I don't, I might really die this time. Or maybe, it'll be two fingers next.

"Momokawa Kotarou, as for now, thou hast but two things to recall."

Ha? I mutter dumbly, but still concentrate fully on the Reaper's words. If I went and said "Say what now?", he'll probably kill me right there. Or maybe even three fingers.

We are called "Curse God Ruinhilde" and thine "Vocation"tenshoku is—

What was that? I really wanted to ask. With a strangely long Western style name, he's saying something about an occupationtenshoku or job changetenshoku or whatever. I'm still a student you know.

But in reality, I only let out a listless "huh."

"-Shaman."

As he thus declared, my heart is pierced. Along with the student handbook in my uniform's gakuran breast pocket, the bony hand thrust into and deeply gouged into the left side of my chest.

"We have thus established the contract. Now, Momokawa Kotarou. We greatly anticipate thine following encounter with us."

With those words reaching my ears, I'd already fallen—

A "Vocation" would be job granted to man from the heavens. As in, literally, God personally chooses an occupation perfect for the person and gives it to them.

The students of Shiramine Academy class 2-7 will all be granted vocations by battle oriented Gods, apparently. If you can't fight, you'll simply die, there's no other choice.

Indeed, this granting of a vocation directly implies the attribution of the God's divine protection, in other words, the ability to wield special skills.

For example, if you get the vocation of "Warrior", you can use hand-held weapons to deal mighty blows. As for a "Fire Mage", you can use magic to launch scorching balls of flame.

However, one must not get arrogant with this power. A beginner who just acquired a vocation, cannot unleash much. By repeatedly using this power, or perhaps by overcoming special conditions or trials set by God, the abilities from the vocation will grow strong.

Meaning, the students who just received God's protection, must give top priority to honing their vocation, fighting monsters, growing their skills, is the only and best way to survive.

"...Aha, I see now."

In the hands of my talking-to-himself self, is one of the notebooks. On the page where the magic circle was hand-drawn in black ballpen ink, these sentences were being displayed with a light not unlike that of a PC monitor.

So like the man had said, the "magic that sends information like texting"

seems to be working.

What is being displayed, is information on vocations. But the text only showed up on the page with the magic circle. You can't scroll the surface, and it doesn't seem like it will be updated, it can probably only do that one page. Rather than a phone, it's like some shitty pager.

"Shamanism granted by Curse God Ruinhilde...huh."

I woke back up in the forest just 5 minutes ago. I'd seen this horrible nightmare just now, but the magic on the notebook activated and I got a nice distraction.

And as I read through the information, I began to better understand the nightmare.

That was basically, a ritual performed by God for granting the vocation. It's a God of curse, I can understand him being a skeleton, and doing those painful things, or rather, things that would literally end you if done in real life, is something I don't really agree with, but I get that it's that sort of thing.

"Right, first I gotta see how these shaman powers work."

Luckily, or I should say, already, there's a feeling of change having occurred in my body. I'm already under the influence of the vocation.

Me comprehending the language of this other world is the foremost proof of that.

That Grim Reaper aka Curse God Ruinhilde's words started to make sense right after he was done messing with my brain. I think that it was some kind of translation magic directly engraved into me.

And the decisive proof of that were the words I was reading on the notebook just now. That was actually not in Japanese, but in an alphabet I've never seen before. Despite that, I was able to smoothly go on reading it with no trouble at all.

Yet to be known memories and knowledge have been engraved into my mind. Knowing something I'm not supposed to know gives me quite the creepy feeling, but no choice but to rely on it at this point.

I look through the newly input memories. As I focus my consciousness on that... Sure enough, I see it.

"This is... an incantation."

"Coming to mind, is a short phrase. This is a magic-no, as I am a shaman, this should be called "Curse"jujutsu I guess. In any case, I get that this phrase is the necessary aria to activate the curse.

Welp, here goes nothin'.

"Plunge into permanent swelter, and curse the body - "Red Fever""

Bam! I thrust out my right hand in an "I'mma shoot" kind of pose. But, it was pointless. As this is the kind of attack that only works with a target on hand.

Well, more importantly, I should consider the effectiveness of this curse of "Red Fever".

"Red Fever": gives the target a slight fever.

That was all the information about that available in my mind.

"Wha... What the..."

Slight fever? You mean the slight fever that makes your body heat up to around 37.5 degrees?99.5 in Fahrenheit

And with that slight fevered condition, you can defeat monsters?

"Yeah right!?"

I just had to do that self-retort. What is this, this needlessly subtle effect. It's not even a matter of strong or weak is it?

No well, I didn't have the image of some flashy attack magic user when I heard about being a shaman. But c'mon, you can be just a bit generous and make it poison or something?

"Slight fever... my ass..."

If the target gets heated up during the fight anyway, doesn't getting them slightly feverish seem pretty useless?

"No, wait, calm down, this must be one of those things that multiply in effect

over multiple turns."

I'll unleash the full potential of my gamer brain and RPG knowledge, and definitely figure out a usage for this power.

That being said, the result is...

"Red Fever": gives the target a slight fever.

No other info comes out.

I can't see this slight fever as anything other than giving slight cold symptoms, making the body slightly hot and tired. It's certainly not one-hit-KO immediate effect type attack that takes down monsters. And of course, it doesn't seem to increase the effect per turn, or rather, as time passes.

"P-probably can't hold them off either..."

Bad, unreasonably bad. I really rolled a trash skill there.

"Excuse me God, can you point me to the reset button? Please let me do the skill selection again, c'mon..."

"C-calm down! there's still hope, there's, two more... curses left!"

This was also in the notebook info pack, no matter the vocation you attain, at novice level, you receive 3 skills with it. No more, no less, exactly 3. It seems there're individual differences that determining what skills you are awarded though. I wonder if there are any special Rare Skills included in there. That much, the info didn't say.

Anyway, I still possess 2 more shaman skills aka curses.

Let's think like this: if the first one was super trashy, the other two must be super amazing skills. Everything's about balance. After all, since God is allocating these skills, it must be godly balanced.

"I begeth you, Ruinhilde-sama! Please giveth me some cheateth curses!"

And so I looked up the second curse.

"Pain Return": Return any damage done to self back, as is, to the attacker.

W-wow! This one's totally some invincible reflection skill! No matter the dastardly beast, any wound to me will become a wound back to itself.

The moment I'm dead, they're dead too?!

"No, what the hell... Dead, in the end, I'm, just dead..."

The description in my mind clearly reads "damage done to self". Meaning, as long as I'm not at 0 HP, it'll dish it back with the same force.

For example, if I get flattened under the feet of some Indian elephant like monster, I'll become pancake. And right after, the Indian Elephant monster will also suffer pressure death.

Indeed, it has the ability to beat any opponent, but having to trade your own life for it is a no go. It's basically a single usage thing.

The ones satisfied with this kind of effect would be either, people out for revenge with no regards to their life, or some 1-man-1-life creed believing terrorist. I'm just some high schooler, and I really care for my life.

"Uwa... it's getting worse and worse..."

I reflexively held my head and squatted down right there. Goddamit, got a bit of sand in my eyes...

"I beg you God... please, pleeease let the last one be..."

I hold a desperate prayer, hoping for this last one. If this one's also a 0 offense...

"Intuition Pharmacy": Effects of ingredients are known, somehow.

"AaAA!"

Forget curse, this is just an appraisal skill! Not even a single, itty bitty bit of attack power in this. No attack, no defense, not even useful for evasion.

In the first place, with only some paper, pens, and a jersey, I have no ingredients at all to use to make medicine. And with nothing to appraise, the skill is completely useless.

At this point, it's an even trashier skill than "Red Fever".

"Ha, haha... No way... I must have some hidden 4th curse..."

No way there's anything that convenient. I know myself best. God wouldn't give me something like a cheat skill. Weell, if I was still in middle school, I might

have believed in some hidden power.

Well, once you've met with one of those "chosen people", you get it. That yeah, you're not anyone special at all. I experienced this just the other day right?

I can't rely on God's blessing. Miracles won't happen either-In short, I gotta open the path I walk on with my own strength. As a person, it's only natural.

But, if there's none of that strength to begin with...

"Uu, it's the worst... Impossible, like... what is this, this skill selection, worst.game.everkusoge"

Whining pathetically like this, I lean back towards the towering, wide tree behind me as if collapsing.

Of course, being depressed like this isn't going to cause a change in these powers, and complaining like this won't help me find some game-like reset button and play from the start again.

Doesn't matter if I'm in a fantasy world with magic, reality is just that, reality.

"Ah... seriously, I'm stumped..."

Before something bad happens, should I commit suicide-No, dying is still way too scary, I can't. No matter what happens I didn't have the guts to kill myself.

Ah, but, I wonder if I can die painlessly if I eat these deadly looking poisonous red mushrooms growing down here.

I must be gazing at these red mushrooms growing at the base of this tree with empty, dead eyes.

If I eat this fly agaric-like poisonously-crimson with white polka dots mushroom, I can really die in a single-No, wrong. Eating this poison shroom will make you suffer in burning pain for a while, and put you on the brink of life and death.

"...Ah."

Right now, I was strangely able to imagine what would happen if I eat this red mushroom in a super realistic way.

"I see, so this is Intuition Pharmacy."

This image inside my head isn't just my delusions, I have the utmost confidence in it. It's as if I have experienced eating this mushroom once before.

Seeing the effect of Intuition Pharmacy, suddenly roused my interest. I immediately got myself up and began carefully observing the mushroom.

I plucked out the red poison mushroom and looked at it closely. I knew by intuition that it's fine to touch bare-handed.

Right, as I thought, it looks surprisingly similar to the fly agaric I saw a picture of as a kid. But that similarity ends at the round umbrella like part, the trunk, no, for mushrooms, was it called the stalk? Anyway, the stalk has a red striped pattern, so it must be different.

This mushroom... probably works on monsters too.

Its effect shouldn't be limited to only humans. If eaten, almost anything should suffer a high fever.

"Might, just work."

As I stowed the shroom into my bag with this realization, I let out words of hope.

"Red Fever", "Pain Return", "Intuition Pharmacy", the 3 curses can't be used in battle by themselves.

But, if ingredients can be made into poisons or medicine, suddenly, my choices of action increase dramatically.

If wounded, I could treat it with herbs. With powerful poisons, I could maybe utilize them in defeating monsters. If it doesn't kill them, it should still give me the time to escape.

"Great, let's do this... it'll be alright, somehow, someday."

I'll definitely work something out. The reason? I still haven't the tiniest desire to die.

Chapter 3: Monster

Awesome! Found herbs!

In great spirits, I collect some of the green, dandelion-leaf like, jagged grass growing at my feet. They didn't have flowers, and at a glance, seemed just like some ordinary weeds.

"Slight hemostatic effect huh... No, it's certainly better than nothing."

Speaking of herbs, there're ones you use raw, those you need to process and extract the essence from to get medical usage, and various other types.

Since I lack the knowledge, technique and equipment to compound and process medicine, I'm opting to collect the ones like these that can be used as is.

As for this herb... let's call it Non-delionfake dandelion, to use it, you apparently need to grind it into paste. I really want a pestle and mortar right about now, but complaining isn't going to help anyone. I just have to make do with the tools at hand.

Currently, the most promising item among my belongings is: the boxcutter. That common yellow one with the thicker black bottom part. To be honest, this thing inside my pencil case was a pain to carry, but now it's become a, primarily herb collection, and in case of emergencies, weaponizable ace of stationary.

Furthermore, the replacement blades (x10) sleeping deep in my bag, make for a reassuring extra supply.

However, the cutter's blade dulls before I know it. I need to use it as sparingly as possible. So I need to cut just till I can tear it off by hand.

"Right, this much should do."

Taking the accumulated bundle of these leaves in my hand, I store them into my bag in a practiced motion. Inside, there're only the red poisonous mushrooms, aka Red Shrooms, I'd first collected, so there's lots of room.

"Hm, next I... yup, I should follow this animal trail."

Me being this sure about the path wasn't something like my sense of direction being on par with that of migratory birds or something. In my hands I hold a magic compass. Technically speaking, it's the compass feature.

The magic circle on the notebook wasn't only good for texting, but had this feature to show the correct path via an arrow. From the inside of the circle, a large white arrow of light projects out.

This compass function, and above all, the place where this arrow is pointing towards, was explained just a while ago in an updated message.

According to that, we're in this woodland located far from human habitat and are supposed to head for these ancient ruins, the so-called 'dungeon'.

According to the plan, the students were supposed to awaken at this dungeon. Unfortunately, I woke up here in the forest, most likely, because I'd gone and did some sky diving, which slightly misaligned the landing destination.

In retrospect, that man had said "On my signal, leap out" so, though it's an accident, I'd ignored the signal, so I couldn't help but be left in my present predicament.

More like, jumping out at the wrong timing in this warp-like phenomenon, there's some stories where you have no idea where you'd end up, or maybe meet your end swallowed up by a spatio-temporal whirlpool or something, that it was only slightly misaligned must be some tremendous luck at work. On the other hand, I may have used up all my luck with that.

Anywho, so about this dungeon I'm headed to.

It is one that spreads deep underground like the inside of an ant hill. It seems that deep inside, there're devices called 'Transfer Gates' that instantly teleports you to a different place. Though the principle behind it wasn't explained, I get what they're trying to mean.

Meaning, we need to use these 'Transfer Gates' to escape.

The explanation states that the teleport destination is a country that's working to aid us.

It is the 'Astria Kingdom'. More specifically, it explains that we'd arrive at a

temple in the royal capital, but there wasn't any more details. Only the phrase, "We are a human nation, and we are ready to accept and protect other worlders like yourselves." was sent to reassure us.

Right now, there's no other choice than to believe in those words. Even if I do doubt it, it won't change the reality that I was thrown into this forest, and I really don't think there's any help coming from Japan.

So I need to bury down my anxiety and just keep moving.

"Huff... huff... T-this is tiring.."

Pathetic as it seems however, just keep moving wasn't something my poor physical specs could hope to achieve.

How long has it been since I picked up those Non-delion, and started walking? I don't think it's been over an hour, but being this out of breath just shows how rough the terrain is.

The animal trail I'm walking on was more or less cleaned up of any twigs and vegetation. But not only is the ground very uneven, but the uprooted giant trees standing in the way like a wall have to be climbed over too. It really drains stamina.

"I-I'll take a break"

I had no choice but to make that decision. And as if on cue, my stomach started grumbling. Now that I notice, the sense of hunger pangs at me. It's a bit early, but let's have lunch.

I stowed the magic notebook into my bag, and in exchange, took out my lunchboxbentou.

But, just as I open the lid of the black plastic lunchbox which my mother had probably filled with way too much last night.

I happen upon the thought, is it really alright to chow down on every last bit like always?

The danger imposed from the possibility of monster attacks can be somewhat taken care of with the use of this other world's mysterious power called the vocation. But next comes, without the necessary equipment, or expertise, can I,

a normal student, really survive this harsh survival lifestyle?

Food, water, shelter, warmth *etc.* even an amateur like me can think of many factors of anxiety. Even though it's a forest, I don't know if there's anything human edible here. And even if there were, I probably wouldn't be able to get a hold of them either.

Therefore, my last lifeline of food would be these helpings of rice and side-dishes distributed half-half inside this lunchbox. And the rest, would be this half finished 500ml plastic bottle PET bottle filled with an energy drink.

I'm worried about food, but water looks to be a problem too. Moving forward at this pace, it'll be gone all too fast. I have to get a refill somewhere, or else it's a one-way ticket to dehydration hell.

"L-let's hold off for now..."

I worried about the future, and made to close the lid on the lunchbox on my lap—

The bushes in front of me moved with a rustle. And just as I noticed it,

"...eh?"

A steel-like dull gray bear appeared.

Stout and heavy log-like arms, the ends of which are garnered in long, sharp nails akin to knives. With these arms, which are practically weapons incarnate, on the ground, the beast walking on four legs, could certainly be called a bear at first glance.

However, though its silhouette may resemble a bear, its large frame was covered in a shell like that of a crab, which jutted out like thorns in places and shone with a metallic luster.

I imagine it'd reach 3 meters if it stood up tall. The great bear looked like it was armored in some steel shell. Its fearsome appearance was far from what'd be considered a wild animal, even humans would instinctively end up thinking, I can't beat this.

It finally hit me. This beast in front of me has to be one of the entities known as 'Monsters'.

"Hii...Aa..."

My small body was completely shaking with fear. The result: the lunchbox on my lap fell over.

The pre-cooked foods, deep fried sausage, chopped burdock, and lightly seasoned white rice. The precious food, slammed itself into the ground.

At that moment, the bear raised its snout and made a move.

Those shining red eyes were focused not on me, but on the contents of the lunchbox.

Right there is rich tasting food that would never exist in nature. The fragrance from which must have greatly provoked the monster's appetite. The bear was enthralled and thrust its snout into the fascinating food.

Now... I have to run right now!

I haven't completely become its target yet. Firmly believing which, I slowly move my trembling legs. Still facing forward, one step at a time, but certainly, I was moving farther from the monster indulging itself in sausages.

It's alright, the bear wants my lunch. I can get away now, I'll be able to get away now, please let get away!

Having started strongly praying to God, as if I've become unnaturally devout in the moment of crisis, I withdraw from the bear's luncheoning in baby steps.

My heart was pounding so hard it hurt, and though my body was supposed to be hot, my muscles felt like they were frozen over. Fear causing my head to boil over, I had no idea about anything anymore. In that manner, as if reality was somewhere far away, I continued my retreat in light footsteps.

Now that I think of it, I did well not to fall down walking backwards in that state. After getting 10 odd meters away, I finally turned and continued swiftly on the animal trail I've been on till now.

And pretty soon, the bear became hidden behind a giant tree and disappeared from sight.

"Huff...huf, huff... made it through!?"

I breathed a hot sigh of relief when. I sensed very strongly from the Intuition Pharmacy-no, not that, from my own instinct. A gaze. With a monstrous presence, something's, gaze.

Fearfully, I look back.

From the great tree's shadow, that monster, it was watching me.

"A... Aa... Uaa..."

It's coming for me.

I, having only just arrived at this other world, have no clue about the behaviour of monster, but I still understand. That bear, it's set me as the next prey.

I don't know if it's being wary, trying to intimidate, or just playing with me but, fortunately it's not making straight dash towards me. But in return, it's keeping its distance, from me who's slowly trying to get away, not getting closer or farther, just following.

If I'm remembering this right, I've heard real bears follow mountaineers just like this. It's all fine now, but not long from now, it's gonna realize that I'm easy prey, and attack.

I can't imagine out-running it. That monster looks like it's got a stiff, thick shell, but I doubt it's slower than humans.

Even if, it had the vitesse of an Earth bear, it's still impossible to get away on human legs. I heard that bears can go upto 50 kilometers31 miles / hour. They can cross 100 meters109 yards in around 7 seconds. The human limit being 9 seconds. There's no competition.

Escape impossible. Rescue-Ah, oh yeah, my classmates all started at the dungeon. Meaning, even if they searched, there's not a chance they'd look in the forest.

Only one choice left. This monster-let's call it the Armor Bear, I need to defeat it.

"No, impossible... like, no way, in any way..."

In my hands is a single, tiny little boxcutter. Even if I was equipped with a

shotgun, I couldn't take on that thing.

Considering my vocation, Shaman's powers - 'Pain Return' can definitely kill the Armor Bear, but that'll be the end of me too. Yeah, that one's out.

Even with the much hopeful Intuition Pharmacy...there's only so much you can do, even with the Red Shroom. This'll only be effective when ingested orally. Should I go for an all-or-nothing bet and throw them at the Armor Bear's large mouth? The chance of success is abhorrently low.

"Fuck, fuckking hell... why's it gotta be this impossible..."

The more I think about, the more the chances seem to diminish.

And, mercilessly, time does not wait for me. How long will it take till the time limit to hits and the Armor Bear makes at me.

"No, Don't... I don't wanna... don't wanna die"

The idea I came up with after using up every bit of my grey matter, was only a way to buy some time.

Still walking, I unzip my bag and take out the jersey from inside. This one first.

"C'mon...please work!!"

Betting on this one hope, I gently release the jersey over the ground. And after advancing for a dozen or so meters, I peek behind.

"N-nice..."

There I see, putting its snout into my jersey and sniffing at it, the Armor Bear's figure.

When being chased by a wild bear, I've heard it's favourable to discard your belongings one at a time to distract the animal. Though it's merely a stop gap measure, and not an actual solution to the problem.

My rejoice was but short-lived. As if determining the item as not-food, the Armor Bear used it's sharp claws to tear apart my dark-blue school issued jersey, and resumed the pursuit.

I bought about 1 minute of time... ah, yup it's done, that was a complete fail.

"-Uwa!?"

Right then, I tripped on something and performed a grand fall. I fell head first into a bush almost my size, and made an annoyingly loud rustling noise. That being said, the thicket did break my fall, so there wasn't much impact.

"U, kuu..."

With a pathetic groan, I unsteadily stand back up.

Despairing from the fear from the Armor Bear, I foolishly neglected to watch my step. I wonder if it's some tree root-as I was about to make sure, my breath caught.

"No w,ay... dead..."

Right there, in a familiar uniformgakuran lay a classmate of mine.

My path had just now strayed a bit from the animal trail, and I tripped and fell because of this. Besides that point, the problem was that he doesn't look anything but dead.

He'd fallen face up and by his side was his bag and... as if he was just about to use the magic, a notebook with the magic circle page laid there open.

He's Takashima... Ah, I don't know the first name. I used to know all my classmates' names up till my middle school days, but since high school, I couldn't be bothered. I knew his face and surname, and never really had a conversation.

Still, he was in the same class 2-7 as me.

With the fallen Takashima-kun in front of me, forget first-aid and CPR, I didn't even do a pulse check.

I mean after all, his face is completely stuck dead stiff in an anguished expression. Eyes gaping open with traces of blood flowing out. In addition, mouth, nose and ears also had similar traces of blood.

It's not hard to tell he'd bled out from every known orifice on his head. And now the blood was in the process of hardening and becoming dark clumps.

Takashima-kun is dead, no doubt about that.

"W-hy..."

Why did he die, how did he die-I had no clue which one I wanted to know.

But in front of this corpse that suddenly appeared before me, I couldn't help but imagine it. That soon, I'd be like that too.

"C-calm down... relax... think, a way to not die... I can still survive!"

If I panic here, it's all over. Crying and begging won't do a thing, the Armor Bear will just follow its instincts and devour me.

Just, just a little more, there's still a little more time. I'll struggle and find a way to survive till the very bitter end.

I'm not hot-headed, nor am I a sore loser. And though I've lived with my fair share of compromises, I won't just give up on my own life!

"- Oh yeah, the lunch."

With a jump, I moved my body, and reached for Takashima-kun's bag.

Please God, it's the plan I thought up really hard. Please, I beg you-

"Found it!"

Transparent tupperware in a plastic bag. That was Takashima-kun's lunchbox.

He was a big guy, I recall, a member of the baseball club and an athletic young man. His was not a normal lunchbox, but this large sized tupperware with food stuffed in, matching his build.

Half white rice with dried plums, and another half Salisbury steakhambaagu sauced with demi-glace and rolled omelettetamagoyaki. Finally, a bit of red leaf lettucesunny lettuce and baby tomatoes placed as if an afterthought.

"It'll work, this can work!"

I made a silent thanks to Takashima-kun, or rather, his mom who made this lunch, and opened the lid.

In the same motion, I unzipped my bag at top speed, and evacuating everything inside, took up the desired item.

Of course, that is, the Red Shroom. Presently, it is the only thing that can deal damage to the Armor Bear, this poison item.

"Three in all... No, with this size, one could be the limit..."

The Red Shroom is around 10-ish centimeters~4 inches similar to the boxcutter. I thought about it for a couple seconds, and decided to use one and half of them.

Like when making stewnabe I cut them length-wise. For now, I put the julienned Red Shrooms, on the steak.

Next, I grab the rice. Yup, there's quite a bit. I can't hold it all in my hand, some of it falls on the ground. Well, it's fine, I don't have to be elegant here.

That's right, I'm about to make riceballs.onigiri Seasoned in Red Shrooms, poison riceballs.

Since the Red Shroom should work on the Armor Bear, it wouldn't attempt to eat it. It'll probably use smell or something to avoid it.

Thus, the plan is to mix them with the richly fragrant sauce and steak, and furthermore, use a white rice coating to give it an inconspicuous visual camouflage.

No idea if it'll work. But, at this point, I have nothing else but to bet on this plan.

It's probably been less than three minutes. Just then, the bushes behind me shook with a rustle.

"-!?"

It was no illusion, the large mass of gray had once again, slowly appeared before me. With great force, my body once again goes into a shiver.

Similar to when I dropped my lunch box a little while ago, this time, the riceball in my hand fell on the ground.

But that's fine. This poison mushroom riceball is already complete. I'd suddenly dropped it, but the plan was to run anyway. In fact, doing it naturally like this would likely invite less suspicion too.

Now, the game begins.

"C'mon..."

With a small mutter, I tightly shoulder my bag and move my legs. Facing the Armor Bear, I slowly retreat. Like before, so as not to aggravate it, and certainly not showing my back and dashing off.

The Armor Bear, just like with my own lunch, started sniffing out the riceball and the overturned tupperware beside it.

Its long red tongue licks the sauce sticking to the tupperware. Dumbass, not that, can't see the better looking main dish other there?

"Eat it... eat iit..."

And, GoaAAA! the Armor Bear raised a grizzly roar. Large fangs the size of human fingers are revealed inside the mouth.

"Uwa, I'm sorry!"

I'd loudly apologized by reflex but, just then, the Armor Bear'd eaten it in a single bite.

The riceball. Mixed with Red Shrooms, the poisonous riceball!

As I rejoiced, the Armor Bear made a gulping noise and swallowed.

And, as if not having had enough, it turned its sharp eyes at me, and slowly started closing in.

"Eh, huh, did it not...work...?"

There's no change in the Armor Bear. With it's usual snort, it again took a step with its four thick, stout legs.

Y-you mean, the Red Shroom isn't immediate effect!?

It's not really impossible if I think about it. In thrillers, you often find scenes where they die in pain right as the poison touches their mouth, but there's no guarantee all poisons will work like that. Delayed effect, as in, taking effect after a few days, or a few weeks, that pattern is entirely possible.

Rather than weeks, if that Red Shroom doesn't work in the next few minutes, I won't be working either, because of that still unsatisfied bear.

Ah, damn it all, my head so full of just getting it to eat the thing, I hadn't considered the acuteness of the poison at all. Even the Intuition Pharmacy is

just a "Somehow known" thing, it doesn't provide that much info.

"I,I'm done for..."

I was about to give up. But then, the Armor Bear's legs stopped abruptly.

GAA! it raises a sharp roar, and stood up on 2 legs and-then fell over right there.

It also started struggling with ragged breath.

"I-it worked! It fucking worked!"

The poison taking a toll on its body was obvious from the sight.

The Armor Bear's writhing became increasingly fierce. Every time that mouth bears its fangs in pained groans, endless amounts of drool is scattered. The recklessly flailing arms dig into the muddy ground, and leave claw marks on the tree trunks.

However, its instinct for desiring prey yet remained, and it brought its eyes towards me. As if by its animalistic tenacity, the staggering Armor Bear used its four legs, and took a step.

Right now, I could turn around and get the hell out of here, but no, in the second step, it'll catch me. I can still feel at least that much vigor from the Armor Bear.

"Shit, not enough damage! I don't have-"

No, I do. If the Armor Bear's feeling the scorching poison of the Red Shroom, and suffering from a rapidly rising fever, a way to worsen that condition is something I possess!

"Plunge into permanent swelter, and curse the body - "Red Fever"!"

The spell I shout out is the first Curse "Red Fever".

This curse that instigates slight fever probably doesn't have much effect on those with large bodies. But casting it on this guy who'll go beyond the limit in a couple more degrees, may just push it over the deadlinethreshold.

Yet, the Armor Bear moves. A step. Distance to me: 3 meters.

"Plunge into permanent swelter, and curse the body - "Red Fever"!"

Die.

Another step. Distance: 2 meters.

"Plunge into, permanent swelter, and curse the body - "Red Fever"!"

Please die.

Yet another step. 1 meter.

Plunge, into permanent, swelter! and curse the body?!"

Just die please.

The Armor Bear's steel arms, rise.

"RED FEVEEEEeeeeeeeeeeeeeeer!"

As a great impact forcefully brings down my body, I shout the Curse. The paw with shining nails was brought down.

-Gaha!?

Before I noticed, my eyes were seeing brown earth. I perhaps fell, or maybe tripped. No, more importantly-it's hot.

"A-ahh..."

Belly, feels hot. Like burning... But it felt wet when I touched.

My right hand is dyed in blood. Ah, this is, my blood.

The Armor Bears blow had struck. It's knife-like sharp nails had torn at my abdomen.

That implied, it must've activated. The second Curse, "Pain Return".

"Ha, haha... I did it..."

Raising my line of sight a bit, there, lay on its back, was the Armor Bear, not moving an inch.

On the smooth abdomen of its dull gray shell, were 4 rough lines etched on, from the insides of which poured out copious amounts of blood.

Under unbearable temperatures, and having its belly shredded, finally, the armored monster died.

I finally did it. I beat it-Just as I realized that fact, as if break time was over, reality struck.

"A, AaAA...UAaAAAAA!"

Scorching pain running through the abdomen. And the image of life itself materializing and flowing out as blood. Right now, the reality of death was coming for me.

"L-like hell, I'll die... here... No way, I'm dying..."

One more. Just one more time, work with me. Move, c'mon, MOVE, body!

With my all it moved, my bloody right hand. I reach desperately.

It's destination, my bag fallen right beside me. Fully opening it, I see the Red Shroom and-the bunch of Non-delions.

Non-delions, these have the hemostatic effect. I need to use them, here, now. I have to bet on that effect!

Grabbing a hold of the jagged leaves with my blood soaked hand, I somehow... some miraculous way, willed myself into lying face up.

As I properly look at the wound... Aa, I shouldn't have looked. It's so red everywhere, I have no idea what I'm seeing.

But I mustn't look away. With a shaky left hand, I undo the golden button of my uniform. Then, unbuttoning only the belly part of the dress shirt underneath, I forcefully raise the t-shirt under that.

Uwa, this is terrible... No, well, it's not like my guts are falling out, so it might be not too deep a wound. But still, if I leave this profuse bleeding alone, I'll definitely die.

"C'mon work... please just work..."

No wait, will just putting the leaves on there really work? Fuck, should've mashed it earlier-No, I can still make it.

"U, uu... Uu Eehh, so bitter..."

The Non-delion leaves I'd put in my mouth, tasted just like the dandelion leaves I once put in my mouth as a stupid kid. Bitter. Not edible at all, in fact, it's

not even food.

Even so, wanting to raise the effect even a little bit, I bore the shitty leaf flavor and mashed them in my mouth, making it into a paste I can apply directly.

I had doubts whether this would really be more effective, but Intuition Pharmacy assured me that "This is fine". Didn't think much of it when I discovered it, but this could've been a giftservice from Curse God Ruinhilde-sama.

"I-if I die now... I'll curse...even God..."

And with the bitterness in my mouth, and the pain in my stomach, I got really sleepy... Ah, so tired... can't last, any...

Transfer Gate. Not sure what to say, it literally says 'Heaven Sending Gate'. So name pending?

Kuro no Maou Spoiler: At present, the translations are at ~320, in around 150 chapters, this Armor Bear appears. It's a mob!

RIP Jersey-chan ;_;

Chapter 4: Betrayal

"-Life is great"

I escaped the crisis of a lifetime.

No idea how long I was out. However, seeing as the Armor Bear's corpse was still lying there, and as wild animals or other monsters haven't appeared sniffing out the blood, I think it's safe to say it hasn't been that long since I lost consciousness.

The wound on my belly, for now the bleeding has stopped. My abdomen was black from all of the dried blood I had shed, but I could feel scabs from 4 large strokes. Seeing such big scabs on my own flesh really makes me shudder.

I remember hearing that bear nails are pretty bacteria infested, and rather than the flesh wound, the diseases they cause makes it especially nasty. It can't possibly be that my own saliva, that I'd used when doing the mouth mashing, actually worked as a perfect disinfectant and anti-bacterial... No, no use worrying now. I'll be ok, let's just pray.

"Uu...a bit unsteady..."

Now then, I can't bask in the joy of achievement forever. It's too dangerous to stop here. Forget Armor Bears, even if it's just some carnivorous animal, right now, I'm completely helpless.

But which way to go. No, I know the direction with the compass function, rather, how long till I get to that dungeon-

"O-oh yeah, the dungeon!"

There's the body of a classmate, *i.e.* Takashima-kun, here, implying, isn't this the dungeon's starting point? If it is, my hypothesis would be correct.

Though, every direction looks like the same forest scenery-

"-there!"

Looking around a bit better, I notice a stone shrine just over there. The mossy surface covered in vines mixed well with the green of the forest and, though it

was hard to notice, but once you do, it's impossible not to.

Standing at 4 meters13ft tall, the oblong structure strongly asserted itself as something artificially built in the deep forest. This has to be the entrance to the dungeon.

Even so, not noticing something like this, I must've been extremely preoccupied till just now. But I feel like I showed quite the quick-wittedness and swift action somehow defeating the Armor Bear.

Ooh, maybe I'm the type who's a straight up genius if I just make an effort?

I happily praised myself while heading to the dungeon shrine when-

"-Oh man, The outside's really a friggin' forest."

A familiar voice, I heard it. That was undoubtedly emitted from inside the shrine... Meaning, one of my classmates was about to appear.

"Heey! Anyone there!"

I don't care who. Having been here where there's that kind of monster lurking around, being able to meet an actual human being, there's no greater relief.

For now, let's be glad I can join up with a classmate.

"Ah? Momokawa? What, so you're still alive."

From the other side of the dimmed shrine appeared, with brown hair and piercings, the class punk. Higuchi Kyouya.

"Eh, Momokawa-kun's there? wow, he is!"

Appearing next, the blond twintail loli, Reina A. Ayase.

"R-really! Kotarou!?"

And finally, appeared my chubby friend.

"Masaru!?"

"Oohh! Kotarou, you're safe!"

Saitou Masaru. The joy and relief from meeting this familiar chubbster, now tears really felt like gushing out.

Isn't that natural? This is more than just relief from meeting other people,

they're reliable comrades who've been given powers of a vocation. If it's 3 people, chances are that there's a warrior or fire mage among them. It can't possibly be that there's more shamans in there.

Also, with some support my shamanic powers can also be made useful-

"Oi, hold up, Momokawa."

But then, my legs, that were rushing over in the overwhelming excitement, stopped. No, they were stopped.

By a knife that struck right in front of my feet. In barely another 3 cm1 inch, these indoor shoes along with my toes would have been lopped off.

"Wh..."

"Oi, what the fuck are you doing, Higuchi!?"

Masaru shouts out in place of me.

"Shut it, and add a -san ya fat fuck. Just shut ye'r trap and go pick up the core from that big one o'er there."

"Kotarou's been alive! We gotta help!-"

"Then you wanna die in his place, fagget?"

From a pocket in this trousers-I couldn't really tell, Higuchi instantly took out a butterfly knife and stuck its sharp blade at Masaru's throat.

"We got 3 people already, don't ya fucking forget it."

"H-hey guys hold on! Why are we fighting amongst each other! We need to work together and-"

"Ha! Momokawa, you l'il shit, ye'r head okay?"

He scoffed at my very reasonably shouted complaint.

"Didn'cha read the text message? Ya must be an absolute retard not ta notice."

Yeah, don't need this, he sneered, as Higuchi withdrew the knife from Masaru.

"Saitou, stop yer wankin' and get that core r'now. I'll take good care of

Momokawa for ya. Ah, Reina-chan, you can wait inside, it's gonna get a bit bloody."

I have no idea what's happening, but it's painfully obvious how it's not good. Then, the situation takes a turn for the worse.

Masaru turned dead pale, and following Higuchi's order, began going towards the Armor Bear.

And, as for Reina, she listened to his annoying nice-guy voice saying "wait inside", and as if completely nonchalant about this clearly bizarre turn of events, retreated back into the shrine.

"So yea, Momokawa, sorry but die for me will ya. I'll thank ya for takin' out that big guy o'er there. Thanks for the loot."

And with real murderous intent and a sinister grin, Higuchi came at me with his butterfly knife.

"Eh, no wait! WAIT, why're you-"

"Oi, stay still. I'm trynna get yer vitals in the first shot, why're you not lettin' me show my kindness and put y'at peace?"

He said it as if messing around, but this was completely serious. I can just tell. Higuchi is really coming with the intention of stabbing me. No hesitance, no regrets, as if it's natural.

In fact, his knife was already raised.

"Now, make it rain-"

"When you stab me, my shaman powers will kill you too!"

Higuchi's hand, stops.

"Don't be a smartass, pipsqueak"

Well, then why'd you stop. Higuchi is clearly wary now. Right, this guy must know too, how absolutely bizarre the powers of a vocation can be.

"I can return any and all damage back to my attacker. That's my power."

"Shing, he folded in the butterfly knife with a high-pitched sound. With the blade inside, the fist holding the handle-"

"Buha!?"

Exploded on my face. It hurt, no rather, I'm more shocked at what happened.

"-Hk! Fuck. god fuck!"

I see Higuchi with the same knuckle marks on his face as me. Wonderful, with 'Pain Return', even a weak beta like me won't lose out when I'm hit.

Fortunately, my nose or front teeth didn't break. Instead, I did feel blood flowing out of my nose. No problem, I don't even need any Non-delionsfalse dandelions for this.

"H-hey, Higuchi-san, Kotarou's"

"Shut it lard! Just get the damn core!"

Perhaps because I hadn't been killed, Masaru made a relieved face.

But, my friend who, not only made no attempt to stop Higuchi's attempted murder, but was still listening to him, earned quite a bit of my displeasure and distrust. Higuchi-san, the fuck man. Masaru's out, can't depend on him.

"Higuchi, what's this core, explain."

"Momokawa, don't fucking test me-"

"You get what my power is right? You stab, and you die!"

Higuchi was so mad, seemed like his veins would pop. But, looks like he wasn't stupid enough to use his knife in a fit of rage. I'm glad I don't have to face the worst bad end of dying along with this asshole.

"Tch, fine, I'll tell you."

After a few seconds of silence, Higuchi spoke up. His words seemed like those of a loser, but for some reason, as if his sourness abated, he sneered at me again.

I have the worst feeling, but I'll listen to what he has to say.

"It's the item needed to activate the 'Transfer Gate', the core. You grab it from monsters like that dead one over there. it's in their corpse."

Looking to my side, Masaru's been poking around the Armor Bears body with

a knife in hand. That knife was different from Higuchi's butterfly knife, a strangely old-fashioned design. Oh right, the knife Higuchi threw was also like that... I wonder if they got it inside the dungeon.

Nevertheless, there's no way you can break the Armor Bear's hard shell with a simple knife like that. Masaru probably figured that too. Giving up on breaking the shell, he resolved himself to get smeared in blood and fats, and shoved his hand into the wound.

Can you really retrieve the core like that-I was thinking when,

"Nice! Found it!"

Apparently he did retrieve it. On his right hand soaked in blood, was a dazzling red jewel.

"So that's, the core..."

"Not bad, it's got a big body, and a big core to boot!"

From Higuchi's broad grinned statement, I learn that there's a size distinction in the cores you can get from monsters. This core think is probably crystallized energy like mana or something. If there's magic, there's bound to be some form of energy or mana that enables its usage.

Therefore, these transfer gates that warp you to other places must need an adequate amount of mana to run. If not, it's like a car with no gas in the tank.

"I beat the Armor Bear, so that core's mine."

A reasonable claim. The core's an indispensable key item to escaping this place, I have not a bit of intention to hand it to Higuchi.

"Oi Saitou, pack up, we're heading back into the dungeon."

Forget listening, Higuchi's straight out ignoring me.

Masaru follows his orders, and comes up beside Higuchi, core in hand. He met my glance for an instant, and awkwardly looked away.

Silently, he hands Higuchi the red core.

"D-don't mess with me!"

"What, Momokawa, ye sayin' y'can take this core from me, li'l shit?"

With a devilish grin, Higuchi replies. Flaunting the bloody core at me.

Shit... this bastard found out I don't have offense skills.

"Yer'a shaman? It's the one that kills people right? Ey Momokawa, ye'r mad right? ye'r a geekotaku who thinks I'm some shitty DQNpunk right? right, then do it. Use ye'r shaman magic 'n curse me to death!"

His eyes are assured that I can't. In fact, I can't. I don't have a comeback.

"Hyahahaha! See? ya can't do it, fagget! The fuck's a shaman, some shitty vocation that's what. Y'prolly killed that big'un just by chance right?"

You're half right, and half wrong you fucking DQN.

"I'll take this core, 'n y'll watch. Don't pull nothin, we got three people-Ah, right, riiight, wow, why din't I notice something this easy before."

So stupid, with a forced sigh, the highly-waxed-up-brown-haired Higuchi says. He must've thought up something awful no doubt.

"Saitou, beat Momokawa's shit in for a bit."

The worst option. 'Pain Return' reflects back damage to the attacker only. Higuchi won't even feel a scratch if Masaru's the one hitting me.

"Eh, I, uh..."

"Do it. And don't fuckin' stop till he cries. Where's that line from? Whate'r, you like that shit right?"

Masaru's frozen. But not forever. He was just hesitating, if Higuchi says it he'll do it. He'll beat me up. Without fail.

"Masaru... you being threatened by Higuchi?"

"I'm sorry... Kotarou."

I knew without him saying. Masaru's weaker than Higuchi. Even in a normal fight, though not as tall as Tendou-kun, he can't win against Higuchi who's pretty tall himself. Not even with his dual wielding sword style.

And, even now, after receiving his vocation, he can't.

Higuchi had come stabbing at me without an ounce of hesitation. He's

probably killed someone already. He's used to it. He's completely ready to murder.

With their life on the line, people will do anything. No questions asked. It's obvious, I'd likely be the same.

I do get it-but,

"Dammit... even a friend..."

Accepting it? no way. No way I won't resent him when I'm betrayed.

"Kotarooooou, sorry!"

It hurt. His fist hurt more than the Armor Bear's strike, more than Higuchi's, much more. It caved in my cheek, along with my heart.

Straddling the fallen-down me, Masaru strikes me many, many times.

"Sorry...sorry..."

Tears come out. Mine and his too. Obviously, both of us are equally getting our faces punched in. His mounting me is of no relation.

The right cheek swells. The left one too. Nose also bleed. Both of us are a pulp.

"Ah right, I kinda forgot to say, the transfer gate here won't take more than 3 people it seems."

In the middle of the pain and humiliation, the last question is answered.

Ah, I see, only three people can be saved. So the 4th person, me, they can't. And they won't.

"If you weren't some shitty shaman, but something like a healer, I'd've already left this useless lard and made you a pal."

haha, Masaru, you're a sacrificial pawn see. Why are you still hitting me? Get mad. C'mon, show even a bit of manly pride, and attack that Higuchi like you're gonna die!

With the irreparable crack forming in our friendship, my heart doesn't yell anything but curses.

"Hey, aren't you glad Saitou, your good pal got a shitty vocation. Thanks to Kotarou-kun being a shaman, I wasn't discarded by Higuchi-samaa, aren't you thinking that while hittin' away. Man, you really got a great friend there. Might be jealous."

Shit, shit, shiiiit!

I'll curse you, curse you, I'll definitely curse you to death! Higuchi, you, I absolutely WILL fucking CURSE you to HELL?!

"Huff....haf...h-Higuchi-san... I can't..."

"Gyahahaha! Man, y've sure become handsome, Saitou!"

Higuchi points and laughs at his swollen face. Goddamit, my face must be like that too right now...

"P-pl,ease..."

"Yea yeah, I get it. Can't really kill him now, whatever then."

Even Masaru wouldn't sacrifice his life to kill me. Haha, if he was that obedient a slave, it'd really be super convenient.

I leered at Masaru with disdain, as he dismounted me. You're heavy, fatass. I'll be cursing you right after Higuchi.

"Seeya Momokawa, till we meet again, I'll think up something to kill ya. Not that I'd mind if y'get eaten by some monster-ptui."

Finally, after spitting on my face, Higuchi went back into the dungeon.

Shit, dammit... Pain Return won't return simple discomfort.

"Definitely... curse, you..."

I could talk all I want. But right now, I can only shed tears of bitterness while seeing the two of them leave.

The worst kind of bastard, and the traitorous friend.

I'll never forgive them-

Chapter 5: Souma Yuuto

My name is Souma Yuuto. Just a normal highschooler you can find anywhere.

After the 3 day holiday, though I felt a little lazy, I opted to attend school, chatted about dumb things with buddies in the morning, and then spent the rest of the day in boring classes-or was supposed to.

Sigh, how'd this even happen...

I open my eyes to find, not the familiar classroom, but an ancient-looking stone room. No windows, it's like a cellar, and there're white panels on the ceiling that shone like a fluorescent light, brightening up every corner of the room.

This stone room has nothing that stands out. Like a temple hall.

With a school bag on my right hand, and a sword bag with a shinaipractice sword and bokutouwooden sword each, I'm here standing alone.

"It's really, another world huh..."

With absolutely no warning, I, no all of us from Shiramine Academy class 2-7, were summoned to this world. It's pretty absurd, but I can't just avert my eyes from this situation where we've been transported to this totally unrealistic place.

Classroom suddenly sunk in darkness. The announcement from the mysterious man. Magic circle shining on the blackboard. If that was all, I could've still believed there was some sort of attraction or trick to it all, but before coming to this stone room the last thing I saw... The classroom run over in jet-black cracks, breaking apart into the abyss. If I see a scene like that, any normal common sense falls apart. I'm forced to believe that I'd been involved in the events of a world of magic.

Damn, this isn't a joke. Seriously, why'd this even.

"No, worrying won't help anyone."

Don't falter. Just, face forward and keep moving.

One of jii-san's granpa's teachings. Never thought that preachy-ass phrase would be useful at a time like this.

Right, first, calm down, then decide what to do. Though I say that, it's infinitely obvious what that is.

"Gotta find Sakura, my friends, everyone."

If that man can be believed, everyone must've been thrown into this dungeon. We may all be separated right now, but we'll definitely meet again.

In any whichever case, nothing's gonna start unless we proceed through the dungeon. There's no use staying in this empty, desolate room forever.

"Ah, right, there's that... magic formation and incantation, was it?"

A necessary power to capture the dungeon. That's how it was explained.

At that time I'd told everyone to get them down in our notebooks, but honestly, I thought it was pretty shady myself. Even so, I had a feeling it could be even a bit useful, and told my piece.

And now that I've been thrown into this dungeon, in this room, my feeling seems to have been right.

Still, will it really, will this magic circle and spell really work? And then, will it really be enough power to protect us? Actually, could it be that there's a huge catch-finding that out won't be after actually using them.

"...Alright, here we go."

My Campus notebook with the magic circle is already open, and the incantation is completely memorized.

Now I just have to-

"Kyaaa!"

The sudden scream interrupts the magic ritual. There's no helping it.

Because the high-pitch scream that reached my ears, I would, at least I would, never mistake it.

"Sakura, is that you."

That voice unmistakably belonged to Sakura.

Sakura was different from Reina, and wouldn't raise a cry for just anything. She'd stand firm even when facing the punks from Kuro high, not to mention crying out would be out of the equation.

That Sakura's actually screaming means she must be in fear and in pretty big danger.

I've got to go help.

Before I even made the decision, I'd already grabbed my sword bag and ran out.

"Sakura! Where are you!"

Having burst off running from the stone room, I arrive at a similarly stone-built dim passage. I must've ran around 50 meters55 yards. And then I came to a fork in the road.

"...This way"

I desperately recalled the scream, and estimated the apparent direction of the voice. Not calming myself in the slightest, I ran straight into the path I chose.

"-Sakura!"

And she was, in fact, there.

Long black hair with a sailor uniform, it was exactly the familiar figure of my little sister. However, her face was pale with a fear I'd never seen in her before, white as if all the blood had been drawn out.

"N-nii-san!"

"Are you ok, Sakura!"

Having unthinkingly rushed to Sakura's side, I finally recognize the situation we're in.

First, this place is completely different from the stony area from before. It's an expansive domed space, thick in greenery like a botanical garden. I'd think I had actually wound up in a forest if I didn't see the white panels of light on the

ceiling above.

And, as if it was the lord of this forest, that was standing there.

"What the hell is that... a bear?"

From its outline, there's no doubt it's a bear. To boot, standing on two legs, it far surpasses my height, rising to almost 4 meters13 feet tall.

In the past, jii-san had called it training, and taken me deep into the mountain where we encountered a wild bear... But this guy's so big, the one from before seems like a cub.

"Nii-san, this is definitely a monster."

She's trembling a little, but Sakura's words are very reasonable. It's obvious that this guy is completely different from an Earth bear.

As this bear was adorned in dulled steel, it was wearing armor.

In reality, it should be a shell. The spikes on the surface, and membrane covering the joints, reminded you of crabs or lobster. But looking at its girth and massive-ness, it's likely not something you could easily snap off with your hands. It wouldn't be strange for that to be like genuine steel armour.

"I'll distract it. And you-"

"No! Running away, leaving nii-san behind, I won't do it!"

Sakura's arms cling to me extremely tight. As if saying, they'll absolutely never let go.

"You're so caring, Sakura, but... I can't accept that request."

I absolutely can't. I must protect my sister, protect Sakura.

"You can't win with this kind of monster, even if it's you nii-san!"

"It's okay. I probably can't win but, if you can somehow run-"

"Even if I run... if nii-san's not there, there's no meaning..."

Come on, why are you being this stubborn, Sakura. Regardless of this great crisis, I'm half amazed, and the other half, pretty happy.

"Don't worry. I don't feel like dying here either. I'll make sure both of us get

out of this."

"Really?"

It could become a lie. I'm satisfied being able to put my life at risk to protect Sakura, but I have no intention pointlessly dying here.

In the first place, even if she gets away from here, Sakura's safety isn't guaranteed. From now on, we must proceed through this dungeon infested with monsters like that.

"Trust me. Sakura, and everyone else, we'll definitely make it back home."

With resolve, I take out the bokutou from the sword bag. The shinai along with the bag, I drop, they'll get in the way.

As if sensing my will to fight, the bear, who'd been keeping its distance and just watching, sluggishly dropped its forelegs onto the ground, and on that 4 legged posture, raised a sharp roar.

"Now, get away quick, Sakura!"

"... Okay. Sorry, nii-san."

Leaving me that in a practically crying voice, Sakura finally started running. I don't turn back to see her off.

"Kept you waiting, monster."

Garuru! With a growl truly suitable for a beast, the great bear glared at me with its two red eyes. The fight's already started.

It's not my first fight with literally no prospects of winning. Neither is it my first fight risking my life.

But, as for a fight with no hope of winning and with my life on the line, this'd be the first.

Scared. But I don't waver. I'd learned how to suppress my fear long ago.

Don't like it. But I won't run away. I know without being taught that I have things to protect.

So, I'll fight. Even if it's a monster, I'll fight without fear.

"Fu, haa..."

I further calm myself with a deep breath. Focus the mind.

The weapon in my hands, a simple bokutou. Just the other day, I bought it brand new at the arms shop.

Its clean and sturdy, but lacks the power to kill. I could kill someone if I hit a them on the head at full power, but this bear covered in a full body armor-shell seems like it won't even take a scratch no matter where I hit.

Honestly, even a real katana likely won't do a thing to this guy. Well... jii-san might be able to cut through iron... but that aside, I'm not as strong as jii-san, the bokutou doesn't come into the equation.

So the actions I can take in this situation are naturally limited. In the end, I need to focus on and go for its weak points. In other words, the eyes.

Obviously, when doing kendo, eyes are forbidden. Other martial arts equally ban targeting eyes. So in normal cases, we don't practice thrusting at the eyes, nor are we made to.

But it wasn't the case for me. Not that I wanted to, but certainly, jii-san did teach me eye-lunges.

I mean really, teaching a small kid such a dangerous forbidden technique, for a guardian, for a teacher, I think there's something wrong but... I'll honestly thank him because it gave me even the slightest chance to get past this crisis.

Gripping the bokutou with both hands, I bring it level with my shoulders. An amateur could tell I was aiming for a thrust, but for an animal, no, monster, it doesn't matter. There's no need to play mind games with it. Just strike with the smallest distance in the fastest time.

Finally, as the bear sloppily moved its thick legs aiming for the prey known as me-Now!

"Haa!"

The fastest, and also most powerful swing in my whole life till now. It was that much of a satisfactory strike, I could boast with confidence.

As if being sucked in, the bokutou I accelerated at incredible speeds pierced

the bear's eye!

"Goaaaaaaaaa!"

Just as I hear the piercing roar, I managed to pull away the sword for dear life.

That was close. The moment its eye was struck, the bear reflexively mowed its foreleg at me. If I was distracted being too happy about getting a hit in, that log-like arm with its spikes would've blown me away. Furthermore, if I was a moment late in drawing away the sword, the sharp knife-like nails on its paws would've torn me to shreds.

"Huff...huf..."

After that series of maneuvers, I was sweating hard, and heard my heart beating like a drum.

"Please, let it just leave now."

When we met that bear in the mountain forest, taking a hit from jii-san on its snout, the bear disheartenedly withdrew. Jii-san always said, wild animals are surprisingly cowardly. They supposedly flee at the slightest smell of danger, so would another world's monsters too-

"Guoo, GAAAAaa!"

Even with its right eye crushed, the bear glared at me with its other eye as if it was my sworn enemy. Seems like monsters prioritize anger for their foe rather than safety.

"Shit, that wasn't enough?"

Crushing both eyes. It's risky, but no other option.

Fortunately, the bokutou didn't break, neither had I let it go. I can certainly attack again.

In front of this raging, savage bear rushing at me, I again take my stance, aiming for the eye.

Getting a hit last time was pretty much half coincidence.

It may sound obvious, but its eyes are small. If I were to target them, I'd need incredible control. I'm pretty confident in my swordplay, but it's not like I can

hit bull's eye 100% of the time.

But right now, I have to act fast. The bear's already close. It'll get into my range in another step. I don't have any time, place, or leeway to waver.

"Ha-"

My sword splits the air with great vigor. Similar to, no, I understood that it was with a speed greater than last time.

And then, aiming for that approaching bear, that fierce burning crimson left eye, the blade strikes. True in it's aim, for the second time, my blade pierces-

"- Guu!?"

No way, it blocked!?

Just, how... the answer, I'd already just seen.

I definitely saw the bokutou's tip precisely hit the remaining left eye. But at the critical moment, it closed its eye.

Yes, same as it's body, its steel shelled eyelids.

Faced with eyelids of steel, the simple bokutou lost all piercing potential, and was tragically deflected.

Then, my body becoming completely immobile from my attack returned by this unexpected defense, I showed a fatal gap.

"GuwaAAAaa!"

Following which, an intense shock ran throughout my whole body.

I suddenly recall, I think it was last year, when I was attacked by some punks from Kuro high on their bikes. At that time, one of them was so mad, he really tried to crush me under his tires.

Back then, just as I was run over, I swerved away enough, and though it looked like I was blown away, there wasn't much damage. I even had the strength to finish off that punk who'd fallen over.

"Gu, uu, aaa..."

But at present, I didn't have the leeway of time I had then. The spiky shell

practically made its whole body a weapon. Also, if you look at its size, it's clearly much heavier than that bike. No way I'll be ok. It's a miracle I'm still alive.

With my somewhat disordered head, and blurry vision, I somehow or other, raise my face to look forward.

It seems, I am lying face down. There's not much pain fortunately. But, I may have been paralyzed.

"God, damn... it, gonna end... like this..."

The inescapable feeling of 'Death'.

I don't have any strength left to fight. Oh yeah, the bokutou's also gone off somewhere. Though, even with a sword, I couldn't stand up at all in this state.

Ah, it's over. When it blocked its other eye, my chances of victory were completely gone.

I, lost. And naturally, I know the end waiting for those losing to monster's like that. As according to survival of the fittest, I'd be devoured.

"...!?"

However, after a glance, the bear turned away from me as if losing interest. No, that's not it, it didn't merely look away.

That's right, it was staring towards the direction Sakura had run off. That is, it turned towards the stone pathway I'd first come from.

"W, ait..."

Sakura's in danger.

If you think about it, the bear's thought process is very reasonable. Me who's practically dead, it can leave behind without worry. It could come back after finishing off Sakura, and I'd still be here.

"Wait a sec..."

Raising my voice as if squeezing it out, the inside of my mouth fills with the taste of blood.

Though I throw desperate pleas at it, a monster who doesn't understand human words would never stop. Lumbering away with its steel body, the bear

continues the hunt with nothing in its way.

Its right eye's been crushed, but the left one's ok. At the very least, it won't have any trouble chasing after and catching Sakura.

Then, no matter how much more experienced in martial arts Sakura is from ordinary girls, unarmed, she naturally won't be able to handle this bear. In the event that she's caught, there's zero possibility of being saved.

"S-Sakura..."

Will I die? I, and then Sakura too. Will I, without having protected Sakura, die?

"I will...protect..."

That's right, I'll protect Sakura. I must protect her no matter what.

Because I'm the brother. I'll protect my sister. Naturally.

Thus, I swore upon that very obvious premise. That I'd definitely protect Sakura.

"I....will..."

I remember it. That determination, even after 10 years, hasn't faded a bit. The hot, sweltering emotions in my heart, move my body.

"U, o, o... Oo"

Slowly, I put my right hand, left hand, onto the ground. I feel the texture of the earth on my palms. Alright, nerves aren't fried yet.

I can move. Then, I can stand.

"O OOOooh!"

Stand. Pushing my arms, slowly, with both legs. I, stand.

OK, I'm up. Now, let's do thi-

"Gu, ha...aa..."

That, was my limit.

Hot lumps rise from the pit of my stomach, and forcefully opening my throat, exits from my mouth. It was deep, red blood.

After which, ignoring every speck of my will, my body stops. As if, the fresh blood I spat out just now, was all the energy left in my body.

Never to take a step again. I sank onto the ground, only watching the bear's back getting farther and farther away.

"..."

Can't even shout. I have no feeling in my limbs. This time really, I can't feel anything.

But, my emotions alone, won't ever settle down.

Please, move. Move dammit. Just for a minute, no, even 30 seconds will do.

I can still catch it. I can still break its left eye, and Sakura will be saved.

So, come on. Just this last time, let me protect Sakura...

"-Arise."

As I was sinking into the quagmire of despair, I suddenly heard a voice.

"Arise."

No, it's not in my head. This voice, this mysterious voice... a woman's voice with an exquisitely beautiful tone, was calling out to me.

"Arise, oh chosen Son of Light."

What was that? Light? Me?

"Presently, this world is again to be plunged into a sinister darkness."

I don't get it. Light and darkness, and the world, I don't get it at all.

"Cleanse that darkness, and pierce that evil."

Don't care. I just. Want to protect Sakura.

"Mayst thou bring light to this world and become - the 'Hero'."

Just then, certainly, the world filled with light.

"-UoOOOOOooooooooo!"

When I noticed, I was already standing.

The feeling is back in my limbs, no, actually, they feel much more powerful

than usual. My body was in tip-top condition as if the desperation from just before was just some lie.

"Uohh, Wha-What is this!?"

Something's glowing. Something, or rather, it's my body that's glowing. Apparently, filling the world with light meant I myself would be lit up.

Looking more carefully, it isn't my body that's alit, but something like a white mist, no, an aura was being released like steam, and enveloping my whole body.

"Is this, the power of a 'Hero'..."

That woman's voice I heard on the verge of death. It was like a decree from God herself.

Normally, I'd have ignored it as some auditory hallucination, but my body, which had critical injuries, had instantly been healed. Moreover, this brilliant white aura was clearly a manifestation of some supernatural power.

"God, huh."

Speaking of which, that incantation did say something about borrowing the powers of God. Perhaps, in this other world, something like God really does exist, and can save people.

"No, more importantly-"

Right, I can't waste time thinking this and that.

If I can have power, I don't care if it's from God, or some random coincidence. I'll gladly make good use of it.

Yes, with this power I can-

"Protect Sakura!"

The legs I bolted off from were surprisingly light. My body swiftly advanced, or rather, it felt like I was moving as if falling from a cliff. Though I say that, much unlike when falling, I also felt like I had absolute control over every part of my body.

Right now, I've become unbelievably strong.

I can clearly tell, probably because, I was already able to grasp the level of my

strength. You can't tell your limits with just club activities at school, but I, having high risk matches with jii-san every day, had begun to see it.

So I know. Right now I've reached heights I could never, no, not just me, I've reached heights mankind can't ever hope to.

"oOOOoo!!"

Moving with an inexhaustible supply of power exuding from my body, I catch up to the bear in no time at all.

Were it by hearing my cry, or by some instinct understanding that some power appeared that could even blow away itself, the bear's reaction was quick. It swiftly turned its head, bracing that large body with unbelievable agility.

Before I noticed, it'd already stood its 4 meter body on two legs, and gotten into a stance to smash me with its steel arms.

It wouldn't be an attack that I, not even the bokutou at hand, could do anything about. No dodging, no preventing, and I certainly wasn't in a spot to counter it.

But right now, strangely, I didn't feel like losing. I'll win, definitely.

With utmost confidence, I raise up my arms. As if I was holding an actual sword-nay, at this time, there was certainly a 'sword' in my grasp.

""Cross Calib'Sacred sword of Lightuuuuuuuuuuuuuur"

A gushing white flash. From the eye of this storm of blinding light, I could clearly see the scene in front of me.

It was a sword of light. In my hands, was a brilliant sword of white light.

This sword I swung down with great strength, easily cut down the giant steel body.

Just like the hero anime I used to watch as a kid, the divine light was overwhelming and made quick work of the terrible monster.

The steel shell, cut away as if it was just for show, I cut through the insides of its huge body like water. But, there in fact was the resistance of it being cut.

The sword of light I'd swung, thus cut the bear monster in two.

"...Go o."

Eyes wide open, the bear leaves that slight death throe and then-that large body disappears.

From head to tail, it wasn't gushing out blood and entrails, but was being enveloped in pure white light. After that, the light instantly covered up the swaying corpse, and before the body hit the ground, it all burst into particles of light.

"U-uwa!?"

As I was dumbfoundedly staring at this strange body disappearance phenomenon, the light particles suddenly rushed towards me as if being sucked in.

I shout on reflex, and move my arms to drive them away-Ah, seems like, the light sword's already gone. While I was thinking such, my useless resistance came to an end.

As of now, the light particles have all neatly disappeared as if absorbed into my body.

"Wh-what was that..."

Anyway, there's no problem with my body. It wasn't even like the light was hot to the touch.

Or rather, now that I take a good look, my body's unscathed, and the enemy bear's also disappeared, the whole thing feels like some bad dream.

Man, that sure was something,- is what I'd think if I woke up right now in my own bed, but where I am hasn't changed, it's still the forested dome, and the tearing from when the bear tackled me still remains on my uniformgakuran. So there's no mistake that the battle from just now, did happen. I was critically injured, revived thanks to God's miracle, then used the sword of light to finish off the bear.

Yup, alright. I can't agree with most of it, but I do get that it's happened.

Now then, I don't have time to idle here. Now that the threat is gone, I need

to find Sakura-

"N-nii-san..."

"Sakura!? Why're you-!"

As I turn towards that timid voice, right at the mouth of the stone passage, was the peeking face of my sister.

"Can't be, you came back to help me?"

"Yes, my 'Vocation' was-Ah, nii-san!"

What a stupid thing to, or so I was about to get angry when, huh, what, my strength, it's...

"Nii-san! Are you alright!"

"Oh, yeah... Sakura, I'm pretty much, ok..."

I feel like I blanked out for a bit. In fact, I have a gap in memory of when exactly I'd fallen to the ground, and raised up in Sakura's embrace like right now.

This is pretty serious. My body is assaulted with an exhaustion like when right after training in a scorching hot day. Being pretty much ok was just something like acting tough in the spur of the moment.

Nope, I'm gonna pass out.

"C'mon... don't cry, Sakura..."

Finally, wiping away the large drops of tears from those round eyes, I let go of my consciousness.

Ahh, when I wake up, please let me be back in the real world. Please, God. I didn't want to be the 'Hero'. So please just get me back to my peaceful, everyday highschooler life—

Name. Souma Yuuto.

Vocation. 'Hero'.

Inherent Skills:

1st: 'Cross Calibur'Sacred Sword of Light

2nd: ---

3rd: ---

Learned Skills:

'Thrust'

'Slash'

'High Walk'

Acquired Skills:

'Force Boost'

'Iron Guard'

'Tri-Slash'

I saw a dream where I was forced to memorize some things I don't really understand... I think.

Chapter 6: Fairy Square

I keep descending on the long, long spiral stairway. It feels as if I'm falling towards the bottom of hell. Well, I myself am not in an uppity mood at all though.

"I won't catch up to them, will I..."

A while after the Higuchi party disappeared into the shrine, I also decided to head into the dungeon. While waiting, as I was going crazy with rage and vexation, there was also the fear of monsters coming from the smell of blood. All in all, my heart was a mess.

To distract myself from the distress, I thought to do some preparation for here on out, and went scavenging through the dead Takashima-kun's belongings. He was in the baseball club so, I'd have been glad if he had a metal bat or something, but the only useful things on him were some CalorieMates, a bottle of Pocari Sweat, and very deep in the pocket, a lighter. Of course, I found some cigarettes there as well. Since I prefer not to, those would be useless for me, but I decided to keep them anyway.

After stuffing the notable items into my bag for a while, and then getting up to head in, my head had become much clearer. Calming down after stealing from the dead, I must've already become some kind of crazy.

I then stepped foot into the shrine cum entrance to the dungeon. And there I found that previously mentioned helical staircase that I'd begun descending. Nothing else to note, there were only those flights of stairs in there.

Wide enough to fit two adults side by side, the inner side of the spiral was a pillar without any blemishes. Made of stone like the outer wall of the shrine, the well placed blocks didn't wear any moss or vines nor did it suffer any corrosion, it was quite the sight.

Parts of the wall dully emitted white light, which made seeing easier. It was surprisingly easy to find where to place my feet, and my descent was without trouble.

Speaking of stairs, I wonder why Higuchi climbed up this place. The destination should be the transfer gate deep inside the dungeon. With the notebook's compass function, they shouldn't have gotten lost. I can't think of why he'd want to come outside. Considering how long these stairs are, you wouldn't want to just climb it without any objective-No, right, I see, he did have an objective. He wanted to get his hands on the core from the Armor Bear I defeated.

Of course, it's not as if he witnessed the moment the Armor Bear collapsed. Which implies that he has some ability to detect dead monster or maybe cores. If I think about what kind of vocation it'd be... something in the Thief or Scout genre I guess. At the very least, he doesn't give me a Warrior or Fire Mage kind of feel.

So then, one of those three must be a thief-Ah, thief huh, that fits Higuchi like a fucking glove. He was born for the job. That adept usage of the butterfly knife too could be an effect of thievery skills. And when you say thief, of course their weapon of choice is the knife.

Still, those guys really seemed used to everything didn't they. It's not even been half a day since I've arrived in this world. Nonetheless, Higuchi already has the gut to kill people nonchalantly, and even Masaru buried his arm into the Armor Bear's insides without flinching.

It's not like they just up and decided to be like that because the situation called for it. Most likely, the two of them have already done it enough to warrant that kind of attitude.

"What if, the timeframe we arrived at is different?"

That seems like a reasonable conjecture. Those guys had started their dungeon life some number of days ago. And as for me, I was finally dropped into that forest today.

I had reluctantly exited the classroom first, but ended up here last. Or perhaps, there's some of us who haven't made it here yet.

Either way, the fact is that I had a late start compared to that fucking DQN bastard. That guy's probably already killed people and had experience fighting monsters. And, as per the explanation, he's probably leveled up on his vocation

skills too.

Can I really start grinding and catch up with my already weak shamanism... No, let's not think about that now. I want to take my revenge on Higuchi and Masaru, but I lack the power to carry it out right now.

First things first, I gotta think about how to survive solo in my first dungeon.

"Huff... It finally ended."

In the middle of my endless speculations, I reach the end of the spiral. The place I arrived at was very open, and much brighter than the stairway.

"It's more like a park than a dungeon."

It was around the size of a neighbourhood children's park. Plentiful verdant greenery with flowers of red, yellow, blue scattered. Unlike the forest I was in recently, the trees and shrubs are much more orderly. Of course, it doesn't go far as having proper flowerbeds, but the grass was cut neat like at the national stadium.

I can see the ceiling, but It doesn't give the closed-off-ness of being indoors. The same light from the stairway shone from 5 meters16.5 feet above, gently illuminating the space.

What's most striking would be the stone fountain plonked right in the middle of the room. It was small and circular, but the reliefs of flowers in bloom surrounded by butterflies all around gave it an elaborate finish.

Its most distinctive feature would be the statue of a fairy standing boldly at the center. Long, narrow, leaf-like wings on a long haired young girl in a one-piece. And the face, super cute. This doesn't bring anything but the image of fairies to mind. This little girl sized fairy statue stood atop the shaft which acted as the water spout.

"Yup, this must be the 'Fairy Square'"

No, that's not some name I went and made up. Fairy Square is the official name stated in the newly updated information in the good ol' notebook.

I'd checked the notebook inside the shrine right before coming down the stairs. It seemed to have updated while I was having my dance of death with

the Armor Bear, and the info supports Higuchi's explanation.

Like how the transfer gate needed quite a bit of cores to activate. Like how only, exactly three people can use that gate to escape from this dungeon.

Why the hell didn't you, even if forcefully, add something this important to the first message! so I was getting mad, but there's no one here to vent it on, so I buried it back in my heart and kept reading the rest.

And one of those currently confirmable pieces of dungeon info is, this 'Fairy Square'.

It says that, in these ancient ruins there are many fountains with fairy statues laid out, which, for some reason, monsters won't approach, making them the sole safe areas in the dungeon.

Endlessly flowing for many thousands of years, the fountain's water was clear like spring water, and made for an important source for resupply. In addition, the fruit from the trees here can serve as food, and the flowers can work as medicinal herbs even if applied raw.

All in all, it's a resting area. One could even say, a Save Point. It kinda even feels like that cute fairy is saving my progress here.

No well, I don't really have the guts to attempt dying once to try for a load game though.

"Since I'm here and all, let's take a break."

Or rather, I should call it preparation for solo challenging the dungeon from now on. Even before fighting monsters, there's survival tactics to consider.

That in mind, let's collect some water.

"Woah, looks really - cold!?"

The clear water surface that I dipped my hand into without much thought, felt cold enough for me to let out a yelp. It was in fact surprisingly cold.

"... it's good."

As I try drinking it, that reaction naturally flows out. To be honest, I've never thought about water as good or bad tasting till now.

Whether it be mineral water or spring water, it all felt the same-But, this water is clearly, good. Really delicious. Almost makes you think there's something weird in there.

"I wonder if, this is recovering mana..."

Puha~ I let out a sound of satisfaction like what my father does from a beer after the bath. It feels like that blue MP gauge placed below the green HP gauge is being vigorously filled up. Though I have no idea whether that's actually happening or not. It's my own body, but I'm not sure.

For now, like it said in the info, seems like there's no problem using the water. At worst, it'd be fine to come back here to resupply. Now to just hope the structure here makes it possible to return.

"These tree nuts, you can definitely eat them, but I wonder about the taste..."

The next thing I grabbed was, Filled with nutrition, with just this and water, you can survive no problem!- the nut praised by my Intuition Pharmacy as such, AKA the 'Fairy Walnut'. That'd be its officially designated name from the notebook.

The walnuts are fallen under trees which line up on both sides of this avenue-like room. They're slightly smaller than baseballs, and have a brilliant shade of green. These ain't ripe at all!?- is not what I complain about. Peeling off this green husk, you can find that characteristic walnut brown color inside.

"And these leaves, they've got a bit of healing effect."

As if imitating the wings of a fairy, these walnuts have two pairs of thin leaves loosely stuck to it. Intuition Pharmacy says that these 4 leaves can work to accelerate the healing of wounds. If mixed with the Fake-elionfalse dandelion it would make for an even better healing concoction.

"Hm, the taste is so-so."

I took a bite of the fairy walnut while thinking up drug creation plans, and the taste wasn't too good or too bad. It's nothing special.

Well, it's obvious cause there's no seasoning, but, just being edible raw gets it a passing grade as food. The look and edibility are the same as Earth walnuts, a

familiar wrinkly shape, so I don't feel weirded out by it.

"But I don't really want to eat just this you know."

Spoken like a true privileged modern Japanese citizen, I diligently put away the main dish from here on out into my bag.

"Alright, now to get my shaman fingers crackin'"

Lastly, I face towards the garden of flowers in full bloom as if inviting me to it. The notebook's already declared that they have 'medicinal uses', so these will become raw materials for making some valuable drugs.

The text message info only talked about one type of these medicinal herbs. It gave some official name, but it's too long and I forgot. Looks exactly like a 4-leaf clover, so that's what I'll call it. My other classmates are probably calling it that too.

Incidentally, this 4 leafed clover is similar to its counterpart on Earth in that it's a pretty rare find. However, the value in effort of finding one is returned with similar, no, much more value in powerful healing effect.

The Higuchi gang has already passed through this fairy square, and probably took most of them. There's no use in looking for possible leftovers.

But as a shaman, I'm able to discover useful herbs other than the clover we were all informed of. Moreover, I could even combine these herbs using Intuition Pharmacy, and make nice meds.

I was scared that it'd be like RPG consumables, and only individually usable-but that turned out to be needless anxiety.

"Hell yes, this'll do it... this'll work!"

Woohoo!- I dive into the flower garden. The hidden effects of all these different flowers sizzle into my brain.

The one's that look like white lilyshirayuri have a healing promotion effect like the fairy walnut leaves.

The one like a red tulip warms you up, blue lavenders are detox, yellow for pain relief-There were many different types as if someone'd gathered them.

"Awesome, now to roll up my sleeves and get cooking!"

Seems like my run hasn't completely run out after all. Finally, I'm starting to see the light.

Author's Q&A: Arc.1

New Series "" Arc 1 Conclusion and Q&A

The first arc of my new series is finally done. Those who are reading, thank you very much. Those who have yet to, please do, it's only just started.

Since the first arc is done, I think I'll talk about a lot.

Now then, if you've read the first arc, you should have a rough understanding of what this story is about. Now, for the protagonist. Momokawa Kotarou possesses this vague power of a 'Shaman', and traverses the dungeon with lots of pain and suffering. But never giving up, he moves forward... filling the main criteria of a protagonist. As for the readers, I'd be glad if you could watch over Kotarou's growth, and cheer him on as he's working hard.

Well, as an author, I feel that Kotarou shines the brightest when he's suffering in a crisis though.

I'd already mentioned the direction this work is going towards in my last activity report. There's a lot of class transfer stories, but they mostly seem to have a protag with a cheat power... I didn't want to do that. I want to make it a dark and gritty story with a 'battle royale' feel.

Kurono from 'Kuro no Maou' had more of a Power Ranger/Kamen Rider like modified super human, strong from the start kind of feel I guess. Meanwhile, other than his shaman powers, Kotarou is still an ordinary human. He can't rely on his powers.

Because the protag is so weak, I hope to draw out a different enjoyment and battles than what you get in 'Kuro no Maou'. Kurono's life could be described as a heroic epic, but Kotarou right now has only just put his feet on the ground, in a Survival + Battle Royale thing and just staying alive takes his everything. Through Kotarou, what I hope to do is express a realistic kind of fear and anxiety.

Well, from the comments I've received, there's been many questions, so I'll try to answer them within the acceptable range. That, and I'll be revealing some

minor spoilers.

Q. Isn't the girls' seat numbers strange? There's a gap.

A. In my highschool, the girls started at No.31. Eh, is it different nowadays!?

Currently, this has been the most asked question. From the end of the boys to the start of the girls, there's a gap in seat numbers. That's not a mistake, I did it intentionally. Taking my own highschool as a reference, I went and confirmed if that was the case at present, and after that, started the girls off from No.31. It's most likely my school that does seat numbers differently.

Q. Relight-kun, what is even?

A. It's fine, no problem... I hope.

His first name is, of course, inspired from the protagonist of the famous 'Death Note'. It's written with the kanji for moon(月) and pronounced Light, but will that get into any copyright problems? I personally think that changing the whole name, and just somewhat borrowing the pronunciation should be still in the safezone. Of course, Hayama Relight-kun doesn't hold a death note or see Shinigamigrim reapers, and isn't aiming to be God of the new world either. If anything, this name would give the impact and impression of those alleged DQNspunks.

Just, if there's any problems, I'll change the name. Retcon it like it never happened.

Q. Can you not beat Higuchi with 'Pain Return' and 'Red Fever'?

A. Not possible.

At this time, it'd be over with a straight punch in the gut by Higuchi. With the weakling Kotarou, that one punch will make him spill the contents of his stomach, and he'll collapse. Higuchi'll get damaged back too, but he can somehow handle it. 'Red Fever' also has only a slight fever effect, and he'd only be able to afford one hit with that after getting close.

So something like using 'Pain Return's' reflected damage, in addition to 'Red Fever's' stacking damage to win with a long term battle... that kind of RPG-like strategy won't work.

Even if Higuchi was a normal kid, this result wouldn't change, and even if Kotarou could time-leap back and do it over and over again, he'd never win.

In the story, it's obvious that Higuchi's already got his vocation, so it's even more hopeless.

Unfortunately, 'Pain Return' won't become a cheat power. As Higuchi's already noticed, there are work arounds and weaknesses. It's an annoying power to fight if you don't know about it, but not something you can't counter. Being able to bear one of your own punches, may not seem like much, but with a weak boy like Kotarou, it's more than enough of a tactic.

'Red Fever' is even more out there. I'm sure everyone's experienced the slight fever before. Indeed, there's a headache, and you feel lethargic, it's hard... But, you wouldn't just skip school or work because of just that. In the end, you only have to put in a bit more effort to go about your daily life. Even more so in a deadly battle, you wouldn't care about some fever at all, and work hard to not die.

Q. Is stacking 'Red Fever' useful?

A. No.

In the Armor Bear fight, Kotarou did keep recasting 'Red Fever', but that was only because, he had nothing else he could do. It was a series of actions made under great fear and tension. There's absolutely no effect of stacking recasts to increase the fever.

If I had to say, it'd be with instant fever recovery powers. If the opponent has that kind of power, he could recast and maintain a fever state.

Only, it went just as Kotarou expected, and the Armor Bear was defeated too, this 'induce a slight fever' effect doesn't forcefully bring body heat to slight fever level, but has the addition-only effect of raising normal body temperature to slight fever.

Meaning, you can just, Oh, my friend has a strong fever so I'll just make a slight fever! do that kind of recovery effect... It really is that useless.

Q. Why so many Archery clubbers?

A. There's some who joined chasing after Souma Sakura, so it seems like a lot. There're also the normal archery enthusiast members in there, so as a result, class 2-7s distribution of Archery club members are somewhat high.

Q. The Armor Bear also appeared in Kuro no Maou right?

A. In Arc 25, 'False Days', when Sarel was in Lily's hut alone, the monster that came attacking and got a beat down was, in fact, the Armor Bear.

I'd written the script for " first, so technically, 'Kuro no Maou' got it from there. It's strength would be the same in both works. The Armor Bear was beat by a single shot from an amputated Sarel, but it's a pretty tough monster. It'd be a rank 3 monster in the 'Kuro no Maou' verse, a fatal opponent for a newbie party, and pretty tough for a solo veteran adventurer too. It doesn't have any magic or breath attacks, it's just as it looks, a large body with lots of strength. Possessing an armor-like shell which has magic blocking effects, it's a straight forward power oriented monster.

Q. The MC having a girly face is a bit...

A. Sorry, it's a matter of taste.

For me, Kotarou, with his personality and internal monologues, having a normal not-very-noticable boy's face, is a no-go. He has a (somewhat) trap-ish face, and I'm aiming for a protagonist's charm in a different direction from that of Kurono's.

Indeed, with a trapotokonoko protag, you'd want to pamper him a lot. Well, I mean, that's fine right? They're always cute, and good boys too. They've been depicted as such quite a bit, and you could even call it the correct, classic, proper way to do it.

But, I think that, as he's not some pretty girl, but biologically, undeniably male, the trap protag should need to suffer more, and face bad situations. That cute face and strong heart, it was good to have them beaten up at least once in the story! If you want to just pamper and treat him like a princess, it'd be easier to just make it a girl.

I believe that a legitimate trap protagonist needs to have an appearance rivalling a pretty girl, as well as a man's heart that faces adversity. It is however,

a personal opinion, and I won't say it has to be like that always.

That should be all for now.

The first arc had some cruel happenstances, but next comes the dungeon capture from the very bottom, please look forward to it.